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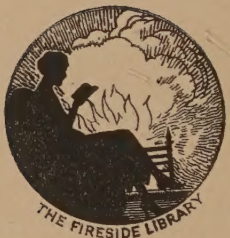
ROBERT BROWNING: HUMANIST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ROBERT BROWNING: HUMANIST

A Selection from Browning's Poetry, with an Introduction and Bibliographical Note

BY
ARTHUR COMPTON-RICKETT
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"A HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE," ETC.

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To Olive

IN MEMORY OF BARHAM DAYS

NOV 3 1952

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A. C.-R.

WINGFIELD, BOURNEMOUTH.
October, 1924.

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ROBERT BROWNING: HUMANIST

[1812–1889]

THE young Georgian has said in his haste that all Victorians are bores, and did not Samuel Pepys pronounce A Midsummer Night's Dream" to be "a ost insipid and ridiculous play"? Yet amuel Pepys was no fool. Nor, for that atter, is the young Georgian. They are just travagant—extravagant with *Anno Domini*. o the older generation the country is always going to the dogs"; and to the younger neration their sires are invariably "old gies." Flourishes of this kind break no ones. They are what physicians call sympto- atic. The King is dead. Long live the ing! Yet it is particularly about its imme- ate elders that the younger generation xpresses itself so rashly. Given a generous terval of time and a fair perspective is sured. Shelley will be treated with appre- ative generosity; but Browning—oh, well, oor old Browning, of course, is *vieux jeu*. A

man can be admirably judicial in estimating the merits of a great-grandfather but may shake his head sadly over his own parent.

Now it is quite natural that a new generation should offer the readiest allegiance to one of its own era, since he will talk in a way and about matters that is more congenial to it. Every age has its transient enthusiasms and vexations, just as it has its fashions; and in the same way as the fashions seem a shade ridiculous to its successor, so do the enthusiasms and vexations of yesterday fall on somewhat scornful ears to-day. But a great writer not only expresses his age, and voices its limitations and outlook, he also transcends it and deals with the permanent stuff of human nature in terms of his art. And so far as he transcends it, his eclipse is bound to be only a temporary one. There is less excuse in the case of Browning than of some of his contemporaries for even a passing neglect. This for two reasons.

In the first place, no great Victorian poet was less influenced by the æsthetic and dialectical atmosphere of his time than he. He ignored its insistence on formal beauty, and strove for strength rather than sweetness. Political, religious and social problems that touched the art of Tennyson and, to a less extent, that of Arnold or Swinburne, found

ttle or no echo in Browning. He is con-erned with religion certainly; but not with he particular controversies of his age.

In the second place, he deliberately fashioned or himself a vigorous colloquial method of peech which is far more in accord with the ashion of to-day than with that of his own ime. Romantic in his outlook—the full-looded romanticism of the Renascence rather han that of his own century—he set this omanticism in a realistic framework, so out f favour with his contemporaries, that for at east half his literary life he met with the cantiest of appreciation.

Indeed, I doubt whether many Victorian eaders ever appreciated the peculiar genius of Browning. For when they did take him to heir hearts they did so as a teacher and a noralist, rather than as an artist. And it is ere that we may account for the apathy in ertain quarters towards Browning to-day. What used to be called the "message of Browning," his religious speculations and moral isputations no longer stir a lively interest. But this side of Browning always seemed to ne exaggerated out of all proportion.* The

* The tendency to read moral lessons in any poem of s received little encouragement from Browning himself, ho, on being asked what *Childe Roland* taught, replied at it was never intended to teach anything at all, "no arch for truth, no struggles to obtain wisdom."

tendency to hurry favourite writers into Genevan gowns has gone out of vogue. To-day we have little taste for preachments; and there is an enormous lot in Browning besides preachments.

For when we consider the body of Browning's work, we find that the bulk of it is concerned just as avidly and concretely with the facts of everyday living as that of the modern Georgian. Then he is the father of modern experimental verse, and the forerunner of that type of romantic realism which Mr. Masefield has at times carried to an extreme. Finally, his unmistakable zest for the bizarre, the eccentric and the seamy side of life, foreshadows the work of several of the post-war Georgians. In assessing the significance of his work to us in 1924, some readjustment of values is, no doubt, necessary. But that is a process from which no writer of a past age is immune.

At the root of his genius lie certain contradictions in his character and temperament which help to explain the texture of his work.

1. He had a strangely unmalleable and self-contained nature. To this characteristic is due his general indifference to the atmospheric conditions of his time; his insensitiveness to criticism, and to what (for lack of a better phrase) I will call the psychic rigidity of his outlook from first to last. In this

spect he resembles Wordsworth, who in
her ways differs from him so widely. It is
mmon knowledge what a part Italy played
shaping his imaginative work; yet this is
w he writes about it to Miss Isa Blagden*
1866:

'I agree with you and always did as to the uninterest-
ness of the Italian individually as thinking, originating
ds. I never read a line in a modern Italian book that
s of use to me—never saw a flash of poetry come out
an Italian word: in art, in action, yes—not in the region
ideas. I always said they *are* poetry, don't and can't
ke poetry—you know what I mean by that—nothing
ating to rhymes and melody and to style: but as a
ion politically, they are most interesting to me. I
nk they have more than justified every expectation
ir best friends formed of them and their rights are
ubitable. My liking for Italy was always a selfish
. I felt alone with my own soul there—here there
fifties and hundreds of my acquaintances who do
itually walk up and down in the lands of thought I
in—never mind whether they go up to the end of
r ever look over them—in that territory they are, and
ever saw footprints of an Italian there yet.
I shall not go to Florence again to stay—certainly
now—but I should like to have earned a few years
that sort of solitude somewhere else in the divine
d of Souls. Perhaps Greece would suit me even
ter."

2. Yet along with this lack of malleability
re ran a wide range of intellectual interests.

Miss Isa Blagden, a literary friend of the Brownings,
where described by him as a "bright, delicate, electric
ian."

He was immensely curious about life, and eager to project himself imaginatively into every variety of mood or experience. Intellectually a vagrant, he sought for his poetical adventures in all phases of life—but, hey presto, suddenly the vagrancy comes up against certain tenacious strains in his temperament. He will cheerfully and with a good deal of dialectical relish justify his Blougram's religious opportunism, but the word "spiritualism" is as much of an irritant to him as the word potatoes to William Cobbett.

"I am going to dine to-night at the house of a lady of rank who believes implicitly in a medium girl who darkens the room and then brings a shower of bouquets down from Heaven all over the table (Heaven probably being underneath her own petticoats and skirt. I imagine they don't search previous to the performance) . . ."

He is quite ready again to use his casuistry to defend his philosophic Don Juan in *Fifine at the Fair*, but he finds nothing to admire in the sensuous love poetry of Rossetti.

"Yes, I have read Rossetti's poems and poetical there are—scented with poetry as it were, like trifles of various sorts you take out of a cedar or sandal-wood box. You know I hate the effeminacy of his school; the men that dress up like women; that use obsolete forms, too, and acclaim accentuation—fancy a man calling it a 'lily'—lil*ies* and so on. . . . It is quite different when the object is to imitate old ballad-writing, when the thing might be. Then how I hate 'Love' as a lubberly naked young man, putting his arms here and his wings there about a pair of lovers: a fellow they will kick away in the reality

In certain things no one is more typically axon than Browning. His reserve, his downghtness, his hatred of pose, of highfalutin—his is amusingly illustrated in a letter written Mr. Buxton Forman in 1877 :

" Leigh Hunt told me that the ' Lamia ' was the only py procurable in Italy, that he lent it to Shelley with e injunctions to be careful of the loan on that account, d that Shelley replied emphatically, ' I will return it you with my own hands. . . .' On my asking Leigh unt if the book still existed, he replied, ' No, I threw into the burning pile, Shelley said he would return it th his own hands into mine, and so he shall return it.' confess to having felt the grotesqueness of a spirit of duodecimo as well as that of a man."

Then there is his fondness for the little social nventions, his distaste for Bohemianism. In ther things no poet is less Saxon. His cosnopolitan tastes—there is scarcely a trace of ational sentiment in his verse—his passion for ne South, for vehemence in form and colour. ven in the matter of women, he had no taste r " the creamy English girl."

" Yesterday I met the Strongs at dinner and afterwards ent to ——, where I saw nothing worth the trouble of ing but the Parsee girls, prettier to my corrupt and tten cheese-loving taste than any of the English fineness d loveliness (aquiline nose between two pudding eeks, with lightish hair and eyes, and fine complexion—ve me these coal-black little bitter-almonds)."—(To Isa. ne 15th, 1862.)

3. The most interesting element in his work

is the juxtaposition of a cool, alert intellectual ism and an ardent emotional power.

Contrary to precedent, the emotional powe lies dormant in his earliest work. *Paracelsu* and *Sordello* are emphatically what to-da would be called "high-brow" poems. W think of Arnold's phrase, "that severe, tha earnest air," in reading them. They ar acute, thoughtful and analytical, with warn gushes of feeling here and there; yet exhibitin a somewhat frigid temperature—considerin they are the work of a young, full-blooded man. But Browning, having forgotten hi youth at the outset of his career, finds it i *Dramatic Lyrics* and *Romances*; and the follows for many years a fascinating amalgan of contradictory tendencies.

At first sight, taking some typical lyric an romance, you would say that no poet ha ever allowed freer rein to his emotions. Usin the semi-dramatic method which suited hi the best, he flings his subject at us with a explosive violence which must have discon certed sedate Victorian readers, but which w are well inured to in 1924. This sort of thin certainly grips the attention at the start:

> "Stop—let me have the truth of that . . ."
>
> "It is a lie their Priests, their Pope . . ."
>
> "G-r-r go there my heart's abhorrence
> Water your damned flower-pots! do . . ."

"All's over then. Does truth sound bitter? . . ."
"Plague take all your pedants say I."

At the outset it sounds a shade too gusty. hat crescendo is possible when the opening pitched so high? But, as a matter of fact, sooner has the story, or the mood, been urled at us than the cool mentality of the oet drifts in. Nowhere is this more apparent an in his love poems. Few poets deal with ore poignant scenes, more disturbing crises, ore tangled situations, and shorn of the tellectual power which he brings to bear on em they would have made almost intolerable ading. In a more sentimental and less virile riter we should have felt with acute dis-mfort that the world was indeed a vale of ars. But Browning's treatment leaves the ader with no fretted sensibilities; for under-ing the vivid, concrete, dramatic treatment ere is a sense of detachment, a sense also that uch of this clash of circumstance, and conflict will, is part of the game of life and has indeed tonic value in the development of character. is criticism of Hugo is instructive in showing w he disliked undisciplined emotion.

"A few of the poems are very fine, many indeed are ckly spiced with good things, but except in two or ee transcendent instances he gives you *pain-forte* for sacramental wafer (to do a bit of Hugo myself). e most absurd thing, however, is the grandiloquent face—all the vast plan that was in the poet's mind

and all his humility about the little of it he has bee able to accomplish, and all his modest confidence in th efficaciousness of that little—and the whole one bi bubble of mere breath which a touch breaks in turnin over the leaves of the book itself. . . . He can't le truth be truth, or a number of remarkable poetical piece speak for themselves, without assuring you that h meant them to join Man to God with the little pleasan practicabilities."—(To Isa Blagden. Nov. 30th, 1859.)

Yet at a later period after his wife's death when the emotional power was thrown int abeyance for awhile (because, perhaps, he dare not trust it!) the intellectualism of the poe has a devastating effect upon his imaginativ art, and we get such prosy garrulities as *Re Cotton Night-Cap Country.*

How profoundly his wife's death affected hir may be gathered from the letter written to hi sister. It is too intimate to print at length but the extract will suffice:

". . . She put her arms round me (said) 'God bles you' repeatedly—kissing me with such vehemence tha when I laid her down she continued to kiss the air wit her lips. . . . I said, 'Are you comfortable?' 'Beau tiful.' I only put in a thing or two out of the many i my heart of hearts. . . .

". . . She is with God, who takes from me the li of my life's one sun—not so in the truest. My life fixed and sure now. I shall live out the remainder i her direct influence . . . I do not feel paroxysms grief—but as if the very blessing she died giving m insensible to all beside, had begun to work already."

Mrs. Browning's death had much the sam

ffect upon her husband as the Great War had
n some minds—a paralysing and numbing
ffect, emotionally, that lasted for a consider-
ble period; and there is the same sardonic
itterness of mood in some of his more imme-
iate work as may be seen in the war verse of
nely sensitive writers like Mr. Siegfried Sassoon.
Yet before the end the emotional power is
rought into play again with something of the
ld gusto and the ancient skill, and we realise
nat the true and most characteristic Browning
the passionate psychologist.

In the present selection from Browning's
oetry I have grouped the verses under certain
eadings that illustrate particular aspects of
ne poet's work. They are not, of course,
nutually exclusive. His Nature poetry forms
background to many of his studies of char-
cter. And his psychology is often interwoven
ith his philosophy of life. None the less, a
earer idea of his poetic gifts seems to me
ossible, if to some extent a few divisions
dmittedly arbitrary) are imposed.

I have given the most space to the singer,
ne dramatic story-teller, and the dramatic
ychologist, and the least space to the dialectician,
ne casuist, and the didactic teacher. To my
ind, the humanistic Browning seems of much
rger significance than the theological or
erely didactic Browning.

THE POET OF NATURE

By a poet's attitude to the world of Nature—the world of sense-appearance, of sight and hearing, smell, taste and touch—we may judge at once of his imaginative quality and temperament. For instance, that Shelley should select the skylark for an ode and Keats the nightingale is a fact of primal significance. For the skylark is as truly symbolic of Shelley's genius as the nightingale of Keats'. The one with its associations of morning, sunshine, joyous rapture, adventurous flight; the other with its association of night, darkness, rich melancholy, romantic sweetness. Keats loved the half-lights and the shadows, when the sense of vision is dim and the sense of smell and touch and hearing acute. But vision is everything to Shelley—colour, colour, and again colour, riots through his verse. He even describes the song of the skylark in terms of colour:

> "Like a cloud of fire
> The blue deep thou wingest."

Turn from that to Wordsworth's poems on the skylark and nightingale. How much we learn of Wordsworth from them—though not the finer part of Wordsworth. For he is almost comically disturbed by the venture some flight of the lark and dwells with obvious relief upon his home-coming; whilst as for the

ightingale's emotional plaints, he is frankly isapproving, finally declaring that the stock ove with its undeniable domestic qualities is he bird for him!

Examine, on the other hand, Browning's oological preferences and you appreciate at nce his decided preference for anything that s quaint, grotesque, for Nature's freaks rather han her beauties.

If, as a concession to sentiment, he tells us riefly that "the lark's on the wing," he eminds us the next instant that the "snail's n the thorn." He is more interested that the hrush should sing "each song twice over," han in the sweetness of the singing. And he s more interested in frogs, toads, eels, snakes, erboas, and whatnot than in all the singing irds put together. Nor are the plentiful eferences to creeping things mere casual ottings from his "realistic" notebook. They re part of his poetic imagery:

"The water's in stripes like a snake olive pale."

With what relish he describes the otter, black-wet, lithe as a leech," or the jerboa, half bird and half mouse," or observes chirrups, the contumacious grasshopper." With what enjoyment in *The Pied Piper* he nters into the description of the rats as they umbled up. Indeed, as a Nature poet he is

much like his own Piper, and with his magic whistle attracts a grotesque procession after him.

And if these things illustrate his partiality for the uncouth, another partiality shows itself in many passages of natural description —the partiality for energetic definition rather than for harmonic form. He speaks of the fields being "rough with hoary dew"; of the indentations of ferns that "fit their teeth to the polished block of some boulder," or of "piles of loose stones like the loose broken teeth of some monster." Not the scent of the rose but its "labyrinthine" quality is what attracts him. In one of his letters he speaks of his "love for flowers," but illustrates in a way that would have scandalised Wordsworth:

"DEAR MISS HAWORTH,*—

"Do look a fuchsia in full bloom and notice the clear little honey drops depending from every flower. I have but just found it out to my no small satisfaction—a bee's breakfast. I only answer for the long-blossomed sort. . . . Taste and be Titania, you can, that is. All this while, I forgot that you will perhaps never guess the good of the discovery. I have, you know, such a love for flowers and leaves—some leaves—that I every now and then in an impetuousness at being able to possess myself of them thoroughly, to see them quite, saturate myself with their scent, bite them to bits, so there will

* A lady eleven years older than Browning and with literary tastes. One or two passages in this letter have been made use of by biographers.

some sense in that. Then I remember the flowers, en grasses, of places I have seen, some one flower or eed, I should say, that gets some strange hold con- cted with them. Snowdrops and Tilsit in Prussia go gether; cowslips and Windsor Park for instance, wering palm and some place or other in Holland. . . ."

He refers to "raindrops that blister," to matted shrubs, dark tangled, old and green," nd occasionally his fondness for violent images ads him to liken a great cloud laden with ght to "a dead whale that white birds eck"!

Sometimes he introduces his love of the izarre and the grotesque into a purely romantic oem, as, for instance, the scenic background *Childe Roland*, which gives a "gargoyle" ouch to his Gothic invention. And he does ll this from deliberate preference, not because e is blind to other and more conventionally oetic aspects of Nature. When he thinks fit e can match Tennyson himself in a line of aunting beauty, as:

> "Night has its first supreme, forsaken star,"

r:

> "Hark to the wind with its wants and its infinite wail,"

In one of his letters he speaks of the beauty f Asolo—so dear to him. But even then it is uch a letter as might have come from any rdinarily sensitive traveller:

"This lovely old place . . . at a season when everywhere else all is parched up, vegetation gone or scanty, the winding hedgerow walks are in full luxuriance, such hedgerows are to be found in no part of England, I am sure. Then the trees are magnificent; the little town is picturesque and the young girls and children simply lovely in the extreme. This is the first spot in Italy I ever set my foot in, properly speaking, having sailed to Venice and touched true soil only at Mestre, whence I walked, through a dusty length of country to Treviso and Rossano where I slept, then proceeded to this place where I stopped for a week. Naturally it seemed very beautiful to me under these circumstances, and I should not have wondered if a second visit (twelve years ago about) found my admiration cooled down, though it did not.

"This time I approve of the place more than ever. It is not materially altered since I saw it first. My old Inn is destroyed, the Pippa-kind sitting at every window of the *piare terreno* occupied with the cocoon of the silk worm. But all else is there."

The other way—the gargoyle way—appealed more to his explosive vitality.

To pass to an equally marked characteristic in his Nature poetry: his vivid colour-sense—though this is really only another aspect of his love of energetic definition.

Browning abounds in intellectual subtleties; he has few imaginative subtleties. He has no liking for delicate half-tints. But no one could depict high lights more brilliantly than he. He is no lover of clouds or of the twilight. His landscapes are flooded with colour. Nature is nearly always in festal attire—gay, rollicking,

himsical—rarely, indeed, is she pensive, agic, or quietly beautiful. How characteristic e familiar opening to *Pippa Passes*:

> "Day!
> Faster and more fast,
> O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
> Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim."

Colour, energy, over again. And who but owning would have used "boils," so that ere should be no mistaking the dynamics of s sunrise? It is not merely a splash of lendid colour as it is often in Shelley: it a symbol of potential life and activity.

> 'Oh, Day" (sings Pippa, and Browning with her),
> If I squander a wavelet of thee,
> Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me!"

There is no transcendental inspiration for owning in Nature such as Wordsworth or elley found, no quiet benison of beauty such Keats gives us; its significance lies on a ver plane, yet it is one of attractive vigour. owning's vitality is contagious.

Take this:

> "Morning just up, higher and higher runs
> A child barefoot and rosy."

this:

> 'Oh, good gigantic smile of the brown old Earth . . ."

these passages from two of his later poems:

"Boundingly up through night wall dense and dark,
Embattled crags and clouds outburst the Sun."

"But morning's laugh sets all the crags alight
Above the baffled tempest . . ."

Nature has its place, a clear, distinctive, invigorating place in Browning's scheme of things, but it is not in Nature he finds his amplest inspiration. The sublime aspects of Nature leave him indifferent. Grandeur impresses him but does not thrill him, and the quiet, subtle beauties of landscape and seascape fail to touch his restless and ebullient nature. For him it is rather the flamboyant moods—the "earthquake" and the "fire" and not the "still small voice" of Mother Earth; and he is happiest when like the lover in *Respectability* he can turn towards civilisation, to crowds and to lighted streets and the sound of human voices

"... and feel the Boulevart break again
To warmth and life and bliss."

THE POET OF MEN AND WOMEN*

Browning's output covered a period of nearly sixty years, and his complete works in the familiar two-volume edition occupy over fourteen hundred double-columned pages of small

* This does not refer to the volume bearing that name but to the main body of his work. He is concerned with *Men* just as Wordsworth is concerned with *Man*.

type. He was (save for a brief time after wife's death) always a steady writer, and ring the last twenty years a voluminous one. But with isolated exceptions here and there, best and most enduring work was done tween 1836, when some of his earliest *amatic Lyrics* were written, and 1864, when *amatis Personæ* was published. The inter- ning years had seen *Dramatic Romances* and *en and Women*. Most of the work was in ort snatches—songs or stories, though occa- nally he developed a scene or a mood into e of his monologues. This does not mean at his other work is negligible. But it does ean that the longer and more sustained efforts, ether plays like *A Blot on the Scutcheon* or ngled narratives and analyses like *Paracelsus Sordello*, exhibit more weaknesses than merits. e Plays, excepting *Pippa*, are not represented this volume, partly because of the difficulty detaching scenes or passages, partly because ough there is plenty of talent in them and a lines of fine poetry, there is practically hing of Browning's genius.

Despite the explosive energy of Browning at led him to the dramatic form he was not lly interested in action at all, but in reaction, he result of action on character. And the ence of drama being action, his dramas were med to failure from the start. It is urged

by some that although unsuccessful as stag
plays, they are good plays for the study. Bu
when you have to defend a play by saying tha
it makes interesting drama for the arm-chai
you condemn it *ab initio*. It has failed in th
law of its being. A play is meant to be acte
and if it doesn't act well it is a bad play. I
is like giving someone a plum and then explai
ing that although it is unripe and unfit to ea
yet it is nice to look at.

Paracelsus and *Sordello* stand in a differen
category. Though they suffer—as all Brow
ing's big efforts do—from being far too lon
they are interesting to the student as showin
the poet's first serious individual efforts (*Pauli*
on the whole lacks the individual note) to tra
the development of character and the reactio
of circumstance on character, and they conta
passages which no admirer of the poet wou
care to lose, as for instance the famous passa
about Spring in *Paracelsus*.

The *Ring and the Book*, published in 1869,
made of more durable stuff. It is the mo
elaborate and ambitious piece of work ev
done by the poet and when it was written
had long since realised how the dramat
monologue suited his genius. This work is
reality a series of monologues loosely connect
by a melodramatic story—the story of the o

oman murder case. "Mercilessly voluble," has been called, and that is a charge which rowning must meet again and again.* But illiantly voluble and eloquently voluble it so is, and parts of it—the books dealing with uido, Caponsacchi, Pompilia and the Pope—ve us Browning almost at his best. Whilst ie famous invocation to *Lyric Love*—with its ouching personal note—is one of the most eautiful things he ever wrote.

Browning was essentially, for all his frank ppreciation of pretty women, the man of one ve. There is a significant passage in one of s later letters :

"I have plenty of new lady acquaintances, some of em attractive enough, but I don't get intimate with any them. . . . Now they all pet me, as you know, and t when I handed them into their carriage yesterday I ade an excuse about wanting to go elsewhere and after at accompany them farther. Yet I would gladly ride th Annette once more up to the little old ruined chapel the bridge—she may remember—where we took elter in a thunderstorm. This is because she is part the past, while ladies this, that and the other are of is present time, which wearies me. . . ."—(To Isa. ly 15th, 1867.)

In the twenty years that remained of life

* Browning is often reproached with telling us too tle—with writing in a kind of intellectual shorthand. is is true—but true mainly of his earlier work. His er work suffers from an opposite tendency. He tells too much. He overwhelms us in a verbal Niagara !

and work he wrote much—much ingeniou sophistry, e.g. *Fifine at the Fair;* much skilfu dialectic, e.g. *Parleyings with Certain People o Importance;* little, comparatively, of lastin æsthetic value.

Did Browning's persistent "society" habi play a part in keeping so much in abeyance th deeper and more imaginative side of his nature in his later years? I wonder. In any case one is not surprised at Tennyson's jest tha Browning would "die in a white tie" in readin this passage from a letter:

> "I dine out ten days running, having generally 'doubles each day, could I accept them. . . ."

It is never safe to ignore anything of Brown ing's, for just as you are fidgeting over th sprawling loquacity of, say, *The Inn Album* o *The Parleyings*, you come across some fin flash of wisdom, some gem of description some touch of high beauty. And you do thi because there is never any *substantial* declin of Browning's powers, only a protracted perio of Browning's wilfulness. Tennyson used t say he had plenty of music in him, but could no bring it out. It seems to me truer to say h *would* not bring it out. For when he likes to he can "utter dulcet and harmonious breath" with the best of them. For instance, in th volume *Jocoseria* (1883), we have a series o

nore or less savage, ironical studies of unattrac-ive characters. The style is mordant, with lenty of the old moral vigour, especially in *xion.*

But the reader feels for most of the time that ne poet has lost the shaping spirit of imagina-on that touched the earlier studies of men and omen. There is too much of this kind of oggerel :

> " And, there's my pay for your pluck, cried This,
> And mine for your jolly story,
> Cried That, while t'other—but he was drunk
> Hiccoughed ' A trump, a Tory.' ".

nd yet—it is in this volume that we get the ost poignant and tender of his love rhapsodies:

> " Never the time and the place,
> And the loved one all together."

Then there is the " Swan Song," *Asolando,* hich has been overpraised I think, largely ecause so much harsh cacophony precedes , though it has charming and memorable ings—retrospects of youth and songs of old ge.

Browning's characteristics as a poet as shown his Nature poetry, reappear, though with ore elaboration and complexity in his studies men and women.

Just as he was uninterested in the more anquil aspects of Nature, so he is uninterested

in harmonious characters. He loves the frowning crag, the lightning and the tangled growth and the more accentuated forms of Creative life, and he loves to deal with men and women convulsed by some passion, storm-tossed by some emotional experience. The more tangled the knot, the more vivid his interest; the more labyrinthine the love story, the greater the zest with which he approaches it.

The chief concern of these studies is Love. There are other interests he deals with: Religion, Art, Scholarship . . . but Love is the dominant theme.

Some of the poems deal with successful love; more with unsuccessful love. But even when dealing with successful love—as, for instance, in *By the Fireside*, where his own deeply happy union is touched upon, it is less the satisfaction of the consummated happiness, than the possible contingencies which might have imperilled it, and the outside influences playing around it, that engaged him the most.

Browning differs however from the majority of love poets in subordinating the fact of success in love, or failure in love to the dynamic beneficence of loving. The capacity to love; that is the great thing with Browning. You may win your woman—or your man. More comfortable for you if you win. But to have known what love is—that is the one thing of

rmanent value. The effect of love upon a man's character is shown in *The Confessional*; e effect of love upon a man's in *Confessions*. ıe love may be one that convention frowns on. No matter. It has glorified one chapter your life. "How bad and mad and sad it s—but then, how it was sweet." So ongly did Browning feel about a man living to his emotional convictions in this matter at in *The Statue and the Bust* he reproaches e lovers for not running away—though the man was married to another. Some of his aders have been greatly perturbed by this parent incitement on the part of the poet to e flouting of marriage vows. They do not e that what Browning is concerned with is e flaccid timidity of his characters. It is not matter of morality with them, but of nerve. Better do wrong than do nothing" says the et in effect. For the wrong-doer who dares e—there is something to be said; though e may disapprove the wrong done. But for e weakling who will risk nothing there is le hope!

The capacity for loving—on that one theme plays hundreds of variations. Find your te and deuce take the rest! Nothing else tters! This is the burden of both Paracelsus d Sordello, who both failed in life because y ignore love. It appears and reappears in

crowds of fugitive lyrics—*Art and Youth, Dîs Aliter Visum. . . .*:

> "Each life's unfulfilled, you see:
> It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:
> We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
> Starved, feasted, despaired—been happy."
> *Youth and Art.*

> "You fool, for all
> Your lore! Who made things plain in vain
> What was the sea for? What, the grey
> Sad church, that solitary day,
> Crosses and graves and swallows' call?"
> *Dîs Aliter Visum.*

Even in that poem of triumphant love *By the Fireside* he reminds us:

> "How a sound shall quicken content to bliss
> Or a breath suspend the blood's best play
> And life be a proof of this."

And is there more of the blood suspended than the quickening content in the poetry?

Love may be ignored, trifled with . . . but cannot be eliminated.

> "Escape me?
> Never——
> Beloved——
> While I am I and you are you."
> *Life in a Love.*

Nor can a passing misunderstanding or hasty word of anger undo its rapturous memories:

"Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last,
Me, your own, your You . . ."

A Lovers' Quarrel.

No: the story *must* end all right: Love is igger than folly.

"So, she'd efface the score,
And forgive me as before.
Just at twelve o'clock
I shall hear her knock
In the worst of a storm's uproar,
I shall pull her through the door
I shall have her for evermore."

We forgive the rather stumbling rhythm and he Cockney rhyme for the vigour and sincerity.

When we examine these poems dealing with ove more closely, we realise that although Browning is so tremendously occupied with he theme, few of his poems are really love oems at all, in the ordinary meaning of the ord.

A love poem, I take it, is a poem concerned xclusively with sexual passion, and it may reat that passion in light or tragic mood as hakespeare did; its rapture and despair, as Burns did; its sensuous magic as did Rossetti; ts tenderness and sentimental extravagance s did Tennyson. But whatever the aspect elebrated, the passion itself is expressed in erms of rhythmic emotion—*to the exclusion f other emotions.* Consider:

"Take, O take those lips away
That so sweetly were foresworn,"

or:

"My love is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June."

Here, and in scores of lyrics that may be recalled, the singer is carried away on the stream of his isolating emotion. Occasionally, though rarely, Browning can let himself go for a brief spell as in the exquisite *Never the Time and the Place*, or the charming little rhapsody on a girl's kiss called *Now*. But as a rule, the mood of passion is no sooner flashed upon us in Browning's abrupt, imperious way, than the poet seems to detach himself from the purely individual emotion, and to be preoccupied with the complex results of that emotion upon the singer's life. In other words, he *intellectualises* it, though in the hurried, jostling, and arresting method of presentment the reader does not realise this at once. I do not say this by way of disparagement, but by way of differentiation. In the Kingdom of Poesy there are many mansions, and to chide Browning because say, he is not Burns, would be foolish indeed. Browning's love poetry stands by itself in an immensely interesting world of its own, a world not of passionate emotion, but of passionate psychology. Take, for instance, Browning's treatment of the Wanton. Compare it

th that of Kipling's and Keats'. Keats ves us the sheer beauty of sex-attraction in *Belle Dame.* Kipling gives us the sheer ationality of sex attraction in *A Fool there s.* Browning elects to deal merely with the ychological complications of the subject. He stes no time in picturing with Keats her les, or the man's folly with Kipling. No, it the *result* of her wiles and the complication an opposing force that engages the poet :

> " Which do you pity the most of us three ?
> My friend, or the mistress of my friend
> With her wanton eyes, or me ? "

Then there is that fine conception *The Last de Together*—a gripping subject . . . and lendidly handled by the poet, though not an pression of intense personal emotion* (as it ght have been), but a brilliant study of the er's vagrant thoughts during that breathless d tumultous ride through the night :

> " What if we still ride on, we two,
> With life for ever old and new,
> Changed not in kind but in degree,
> The instant made eternity,
> And Heaven just prove that I and she
> Ride, ride together, for ever ride ? "

Just as Browning is never primarily con- ned with beauty of expression, so he never

* Hence Browning does not always give us time to the emotion—he begins to ask, what does it all mean ? ore we quite realise the storm and stress of " it."

insists on beauty as a factor in sex attraction We know very little of the personal appearanc of his lovers, of their physical charm. We d know he is attracted to the golden-haired type.* Such appear again and again in his poems For the rest, the insistence is usually upon th power of the woman to transfigure the man' life, lift it on to a higher plane, give it a ne strength, a more fixed purpose. Indeed, some times he is at pains to dwell on the quaintnes rather than perfection of the lady :

> "And your mouth—there was never to my mind
> Such a funny mouth, for it would not shut,
> And the dented chin too—what a chin!"
> *One Word More.*

Yet what a touch of familiar tenderness h achieves this way!

With his Defoe-like power of actualising little sketch with detail, he might with advar tage have heightened the sensuous atmospher of some of his love poems. He criticise Tennyson in one of his letters (though h admiration for much of his work is well known)

> "Well, I go a long way with you in the feeling abo Tennyson's new book,† it is all out of my head alread We look at the object of art in Poetry so differentl There is an Idyll about a knight being untrue to h friend and yielding to the temptation of that friend

* Palma, Evelyn Hope, Porphyria, the "beautif girl" of Pornic.

† *The Holy Grail and Other Poems.*

istress after having engaged to assist him in his suit. should judge the conflict in the knight's soul the proper ıbject to describe, not the effect of the moon on the wers, and anything *but* the soul. . . ."

This particular criticism may or may not be ıst, but Browning's anxiety to pounce upon ıe " soul " problem leads him at times to run ɔ the opposite extreme and ignore the value f the setting. Tennyson sometimes, as in *noch Arden*, over-did his settings. Browning inclined to give us his picture on occasion ithout any frame. This he does in such oems at *The Worst of it* and *Bifurcation*. Vould we had more love poems like the *arting at Night*, where every stroke tells, or ıe grim nocturne *Porphyria's Lover*. He is ways telling us and with force and eloquence, hat Love does. Only once does he make us el what love *is*. Then his imagination caught re suddenly with the passionate surge of his notion; and the words live like stars and ill survive in literature when many of his illiant studies are extinct and forgotten :

> " O lyric love—half angel and half bird
> And all a wonder and a wild desire."

In the same way as he treats Love, he treats rt and Religion. Browning knew a very great eal about Art. Like Milton, he was an complished musician and fond of music, and th painting and the plastic arts attracted him.

But music was a passion with him at any time; he numbered several famous musician among his friends, and one has only to run down the titles of his poems to see how lovingly and enthusiastically he has written about it. *Charles Avison, Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, Toccata of Galuppi's, Abt Vogler* are full length studies of the musician's craft and musical phrases are scattered over many of his poems.

And yet he never troubles to convey the emotional value of music in his verse. I am not speaking of the musical quality of his poetry (there is more to be said for that than is sometimes allowed) but of the purely æsthetic significance of music. He is concerned almost entirely with the relation between music and life. What ethical significance has it? What are its psychological reactions? After all, it is not the psychological, it is the psychic influence of music which has so big a human significance. Never does he suggest the haunting magic of music as his wife does in her *What was he doing, the great God Pan.* Jessica's familiar "I am never merry when I hear sweet music," tells us something more deeply satisfying than does Master Hugues in the whole of his learned discourse. And personally I would sacrifice all Abt Vogler's vigorous reflections about the "C major of this life" and the "discords rushing in

that harmony shall be prized" for Keats' magical

> "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter; therefore ye soft pipes play on;
> Not to the sensual ear, but more endeared
> Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone."

The intellectual element in painting is more considerable and Browning's treatment of it consequently more satisfying. As with music, he wrote with something above the knowledge of the average man of culture. Since his boyhood, when he had been acquainted with the paintings in the Dulwich Gallery, he had studied carefully and with a fine natural taste the works of the masters. But it isn't his technical knowledge of studio life, or his feeling for draughtsmanship that gives such value to his poems on pictorial Art, it is his instinct for the stuff of human life which feeds art and gives it its inspiration. He could express himself quite bluntly about an acquaintance's work:

> "Poynter's portraits are dreadful, vulgar to the last degree and one, at least, with hands altogether shamefully drawn."

Browning never dramatised a temperament with profounder skill than he does in *Andrea del Sarto*—the magnificent failure, with his faultless technique and spiritual timidity.

Fra Lippo Lippi is a more attractive poem but that jolly, pleasure-loving soul with his frank worldliness was far easier to actualise (and had more of Robert Browning in him) than the tragic and melancholy Andrea.

Andrea in the opening is sitting with his wife—the wife who has failed him—on the wooden seat that overlooks Fiesole. While he is talking to her, trying to rouse her interest she smiles and in that smile he sees his picture. It is a weary, autumn smile. And Autumn, he realises, is his key.

> "There's my picture ready made,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> A common greyness silvers everything,
> All in a twilight, you and I alike."

He has his superb technique and can do "what many dream of all their lives"—but there is much truer greatness in them with their crude imperfection. For they have ideals. He has none. "All is silver grey placid and perfect." I am not concerned here with the theory of human life favoured by the poet which underlies this poem and many another, but with the delicate skill with which he depicts the spiritual paralysis of the painter.

Robert Browning treats Religion in the same way as he treats Love and Art. Rarely does he treat Religion synthetically, as an emotional force illuminating every side of life. He

efers to treat it analytically as a dialectical rce, influencing the reason, stimulating the entality. So just as he is not a love poet the ordinary sense of the word, neither is a religious poet in the sense that Vaughan d Crashaw and George Herbert and Francis hompson and Elizabeth Barrett were religious ets. There is very little mysticism in rowning, scarcely a trace of the devotional ood. He can by a dramatic effort enter into e mystic attitude (or a phase of it) for a w moments, as he does in his poem *Johannes gricola;* but it is not congenial to him as a et. He is happier in showing us where ligion fails than where it succeeds. He is eatly concerned, as in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, in aking it appear a *reasonable* thing: too little ncerned—for a poet—in making it appear a *autiful* thing, and this is due to the tenuity his mystical sympathies. To the mystic the sible Universe presents no exact boundary tween the realm of sense and the realm of irit. For physical things are symbols of vine realities. To the mystic, as to the ist, the whole material world is suffused th "the light that never was on sea or nd"; it is a half-transparent curtain through ich the sensitive soul may detect the ights and shadows," as James Martineau has ely said, "thrown on it from behind, by the

ceaseless play of Infinite thought." Whether such a view of the Universe satisfies the intelligence is another matter altogether. But, at any rate, this Pantheistic view is a view which the poet is peculiarly fitted to express. And it is one that Browning largely disregarded.* He is concerned primarily with the pragmatic utility of religion—truth of belief, which, according to him, comes through right action.

His real strength in religious poetry lies in his skill as a psychologist.

The mingling of superstition and sensuality, its meanness and its venom leap at us in the stanzas of the *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*, its tragic irony in the querulous directions of the dying Bishop of St. Praxed's Church.

> "Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then!
> 'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve.
> My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
> And have I not St. Praxed's ear to pray
> Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
> And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
> —That's if ye carve my epitaph aright."

Equally happy is he in presenting the shrewd worldly-wise opportunism of a Blougram, or satirising religious extravagance in *Christmas Eve and Easter Day;* in giving us the reaction of Christianity on the mind and temperament

* There are traces of it in his earlier work, e.g. *Paracelsus*, but with the passage of years Browning's theology becomes less and less Pantheistic.

f an Arab physician, of a Greek poet, of a abbi. He can render for us the simple piety f a Pippa or a Pompilia, but when he speaks o us of his own convictions, as we find he is oing in the thin disguise of *Abt Vogler* or *abbi Ben Ezra*, or without any disguise in *everie* and *Prospice*—he speaks as a sturdy oralist rather than as a spiritual seer.

In reviewing Browning's treatment of character and the reaction of certain passions upon haracter, there is one point that distinguishes im from the poets of our own day. Curious s he was about all sides of life, and unflinching as he is in dealing with the painful nd tempestuous aspects, he has no pathological predelictions. It is true that occasionally he gets hold of an unsavoury subject, s in *Cristina and Monaldeschi*, or *The Inn lbum*, but in his failure as an artist to make hese stories live it is clear that, however hey may have interested him intellectually, hey had never gripped his imagination. He as a number of poems—some already touched pon—dealing with fear, revenge, envy, ealousy, hatred; some of these are brief, harply-outlined studies, others drawn on a igger scale, but they are portrayed in a frank, irile, vigorous fashion that is free of any charnel house" fancies. Here again he lets he turbid heat of the passion pass through the

cooling chamber of his alert mentality before he gives it to us. And, as always, it isn't the passion in *itself* but the passion in a certain environment, and affecting a set of characters, that really concerns him. We think of the sultry passion of Ottima and Sebald just as an episode, in the fresh, sweet morning atmosphere of Pippa. Browning's sardonic humour (a form of humour that best suited him) lightens a number of these studies—e.g. *Instans Tyrannus;* his sense of pity cleanses verse like the *Forgiveness*, which has a touch of Webster's grim intensity. The most ambitious study of sheer evil is that of Guido in *The Ring and the Book.* It is splendidly done, full of keen, intellectual strokes and flashes of passionate imagination. There is no more dramatic passage in his writings than the expression of Guido's terror when he realises all his bragging and lying have gone for naught and that he is marked for Death. He hears the fateful message descending the stairs to his cell and screams out:

> "Treachery!
> Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
> Out of the world of words I had to say?
> Not one word. . . . Life is all
> I was just stark mad—let the madman live
> Pressed by as many chains as you please pile
> Don't open! hold me from them. . . .
> Abate, Cardinal—Christ—Maria—God . . .
> Pompilia will you let them murder me?"

THE POET'S VIEW OF LIFE

The intuitions of the Poet have always influenced the religious and ethical thought of mankind.

The impassioned contemplation of the world such as we find in the great poets along the ages, liberates the impulse for beauty and harmony in our minds, detaching us from the ugliness and chaos we see round us, by assuring us of the persistent continuity in human history of the primal qualities—love, pity, courage and endurance. For the poet who counts is much more than the interpreter of a familiar world; he is the maker of a new world, an ideal world in which he invites us to take a part and so help to conquer the ugliness and eliminate the chaos. If, as Plato asserted, harmony is the first condition of the highest good, the poet's vocation is second to none.

May we not say, then, that we have in Poetry a common inspiration both for those to whom life is only the gateway to a fairer and ampler existence and for those to whom it is (as in the old Scandinavian saying) like the flight of a bird from out of the darkness, across a lighted room, into the darkness beyond.

There are some to whom the Poet is just a fantastic dreamer, whose flutings, however

agreeable to the ear, have no bearing upon the truths of practical life. There are others to whom the poet is a kind of local preacher. To them his works are valuable only so far as they can squeeze out a body of doctrine that may satisfy their particular tenets; and they are never easy until they have tested his rhythmic beauties by the cadences of the harmonium. Browning, in particular, has suffered from this treatment. This is a great pity, for it encourages a spirit of violent reaction which expresses itself in the statement that Art has nothing to do with Morality. Art expresses life: morality is a factor in life: necessarily Art, therefore, is concerned with Morality. To be concerned with morality, however, does not involve the didactic exposition of a code of rules. It means that the artist must show by his general treatment of the facts of life, the significance of his attitude. His morality will saturate his work like an atmosphere, not extrude from it like a decalogue.

To examine the inspiration of great poetry more closely. May I roughly define great poetry as a *profound and emotional reaction to life expressed in terms of rhythmic art.*

It is profound inasmuch as it deals with essentials not accidentals, and though conditioned by its age it may be given to us with

the conventions of a particular period, yet, for all that, it reaches the common universal stuff of human nature. By profound, then, I do not mean intellectually profound or morally profound, but *vitally* profound. And should my meaning still be obscure, let me illustrate by the work of Chaucer who was certainly neither a great thinker nor a great moralist, but was as certainly a great artist. A poet whose creations, e.g. *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, are as fresh and actual to-day in their frailties and excellences, as when they were first depicted, can have achieved this result only by an instinct of genius that surely must be called profound. For genius is of the centre, not of the circumference.

It is emotional. The great poet does not seek logically to explain life, and in as far as he uses dialectic (which Browning does on occasion) he is not great. The great poet seeks to express life, according to his particular experience, with passionate sympathy. And because of his passionate sympathy his work is dynamic. After reading Shakespeare's *Lear* our imaginations are purged by the pity and terror of it. It is the most terrible of Shakespeare's plays, for he shows us the darkest abysses of human nature. Yet by virtue of this passionate sympathy, this emotional presentment of life, the terms good and evil,

wisdom and folly, take on for us a more vivid and compelling significance. The heart-broken incoherencies of the frenzied old man over his dead daughter, the electrical "Never"—four times repeated—these things have power not merely to stir and thrill us, but to enlarge the very range of our sympathies. And in a lesser though no less true way are we moved by Browning's tribute to the supreme love in his life, by the tender loveliness of Evelyn Hope, by the pathos of Pompilia, or by the old poet's courageous gesture to Death in *Prospice*. It is the emotional experience flashed from the poet's soul to our own that sanctifies and sweetens and gives to such poetry its inspiration.

It is a reaction to life, and by life is meant both the inner life of the imagination and the outer life of the senses. It is the business of the poet to co-ordinate these—the inner and ideal life, and the outer or real life. But the Idealist, impatient with the conditions of the outer life, is often tempted either to cover up what is harsh and ugly in the outer life with a decorative prettiness, or else to escape from the rough realities of the world into a sequestered and magical world of his own. Each way results in a loss of power to the poet. Browning followed neither one nor the other. He had a frank and hearty zest for

the outer life—and he and Whitman are at one in this, that they essayed to freshen and invigorate the ideal life, by drawing more boldly and extensively upon the world of reality. Such an attempt involved a change both in the manner and the matter of his Art.

It is indeed this change which has made Browning a power to the poets of our own day. Something necessarily has been said on both these points in the preceding pages, but in concluding this tentative survey of Browning's position as a poet, a few generalisations may be hazarded.

The Manner.—Browning's way of addressing his public upon the issues of life which interested him the most is a piquant mingling of chatter and song. He did to English Poetry what Steele did to the English Essay. He *informalised* it.* He brought into his subject-matter, whether religious, amatory, or relating to art, a familiar, direct, unconventional method of speech, which despite obvious disadvantages (for poetry is not prose) proved arresting and convincing. It was not a pose, although it was deliberately adopted in the face of tradition, for it was a manner peculiarly suited to his character and temperament. Often it was lacking in formal

* To coin a word.

beauty, but it would be a great mistake to imagine that Browning eschewed beauty, and when the subject imperatively demanded it the poet rose to the occasion and the style became heightened and chastened. He was a realist in method, and when he had to deal with uncouth or homely subject-matter, he dealt with it in a homely and uncouth way. Take these stanzas from *Shop:*

"Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give?

"I want to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit.
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute!"

So far the colloquial, homely style for the homely matter. But in the next verse the idealist has something to say. The colloquial style is not wholly dropped, that would be bad art, but it is heightened and sobered by the poet's emotion and the cumulative effect is fine and impressive:

"But—shop each day and all day long!
Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!
From where these sorts of treasures are,
There should our hearts be—Christ, how far!"

Sometimes, as we know, the colloquial method plunges us into sheer doggerel, but it was a contingency which he faced with equanimity and deliberately. Better doggerel than sham heroics and stucco-sentiment!

If, however, the poetry of Browning is largely colloquial in manner, rarely does the colloquialism become a trick or a mannerism, as it does so often with Whitman. It is extremely varied in tone and temper. There is the colloquialism of Cristina:

> "She should never have looked at me
> If she meant I should not love her,"

with its impetuous urgency.

There is the colloquialism of the song, "A King lived long ago in the morning of the world," with its air of easy, fanciful improvisation; or the colloquialism—acrid and jerky—of Holy Cross Day: "Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak! Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week." And yet each in its own way is right. The tone and the tempo are suited exactly to what he sets out to sing—or say.

For Browning's undress method of speech must not blind us to the fact that he was a master of metre and rhythm. If we find him rarely musical with the delicate limpidity of Tennyson, or the chromatic brilliance of Swinburne, yet sometimes leaving his grotesque

piping aside, the poet used the magic whistle to lure youth and charm and sweetness after him. He is often harsh, sometimes discordant, he is over fond of monosyllables and is too sparing with his vowel sounds; but he is astonishingly varied in his metres. There is the galloping measure of his "horseman" lyrics, the slow, sweeping measure he uses in *Evelyn Hope*, the slow, stabbing measure of *A Woman's Last Word*, the drum and trumpet music of his Cavalier lyrics. What could be smoother or sweeter than "'Twas roses, roses all the way"? What could be rougher or harsher than "Savage I was sitting in my house, late, lone," or the more famous, "Irks care the crop-full bird, Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast"? Yet in each case the metre gives the effect desired.

But, whatever the metre or the rhythm, the final effect upon the reader of Browning's manner is the effect of an eager and restless vitality, and though beauty may break through it is the beauty that accompanies power, not the beauty that accompanies peace.

This brings us to the second consideration—*the matter*.

Whatever his theological views may have been, he is, as poet, pre-eminently the poet of the world. I do not doubt for a moment that supernatural religion meant much to him

nd honestly and valiantly he speaks his views. Jone the less, as an artist he seems to me the nost convincing and the most alive when he s the spectator of earthly life and earthly truggles, earthly joys and difficulties. He oved life—every phase of it. "Scenting the vorld, looking it full in face"—with an mmense physical zest and heartiness. He oved things that he could touch and handle, nd his poetry is alive not merely with in-ellectual force, but with a fierce and tenacious ervous and muscular energy.

> "When frothy spume and frequent sputter
> Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest."

He was a great poet and every great poet s necessarily an idealist, for ideals are among he most vital facts of life. But his creative nergy is more concerned in the rough and umble fight for the ideal than in the ideal itself. He is really much more interested with the broken arc" than with the "perfect round." Carlyle declared that Life was no May game, ut a battle and a march. Browning, a Pagan n intellect though a Puritan in morals, would ave agreed with this, but for him the battle vas quite as exhilarating and attractive as ny May festivities. He was a born fighter. n an earlier age he would have been one of he Knights Templar (no troubadour dallyings

for him); in a later era he would have thrown in his lot with Drake or Hawkins; in his own age there was no opening for knocking off men's heads, though the anecdotes around Forster and Fitzgerald suggest that even in decorous Victorian society this might not have proved wholly uncongenial: he elected to deal with the roughnesses and tangles of life, not primarily as a moralist is concerned in justifying the ways of God to man, but as an artist to whom complexity was a joy and as a man to whom a "scrap" was an unfailing delight.

"Then welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough." Note the "welcome." Is it sufficient to quote this as so often it is done, as a testimony to his moral courage? He was a courageous man, no doubt, but do not let us forget that without the rebuff Browning would have felt decidedly at a loss. Remember the line in *Sordello*: "... For what is joy? To heave up one obstruction more." That is Browning all over. Joy for him is never a static affair. "Joy's soul lies in the doing"; Cressida spoke more wisely than she recked. And in his thoughts of the other world he hints that the struggle may still go on. He never yearns for "green pastures and still waters." We cannot imagine him saying "Unarm, Eros, the long day's task is done." I do not believe that the "One fight

more" would have satisfied him. Repose is not in his vocabulary. And for all the bracing stimulus of his verse, one sighs at times for those moods of fine receptive passivity which have meant so much to some poets and which are fully as fruitful for the soul. But that is to ask of Browning something that he cannot give. He is at his best with his sword and buckler. Like Macbeth (though the analogy need scarcely be pressed!) he feels that his strength lies in action, and demands "Give me mine armour." He was a man of immense vitality, and vitality must have an outlet. As a boy he was clamouring for something to do, and his activities seemed endless. He could sing, play, dance, ride, fence and box. Later in life, not content with his enormous output as a writer, he essayed self-expression in clay modelling, and his musical craftsmanship was a pleasure to himself and others almost to the very end.

This vitality displays itself in another familiar characteristic. He was naturally buoyant in his attitude towards life. Buoyancy is a pleasant and companionable quality, but there is no need to accord the poet a halo because of it. Courage and endurance may be spiritual qualities as well as physical, but buoyancy is the outcome of a eupeptic condition and a good blood supply. Browning

enjoyed remarkable physical health. "The healthiest man I ever knew," was his son's verdict, whilst he himself has given testimony to the sense of abounding physical fitness which was his dower.

Some have attributed the buoyancy and cheerfulness of Browning to the fact that his lines had fallen in pleasant places. This is unfair to him. It is true that he never had to face the same hardships as some men of letters have—his friend Carlyle, for instance. But he had his share of sorrow and struggle—more than many readers wot of—and has himself said that the painful experiences of his life outweigh the pleasurable. Yet this buoyancy and cheerfulness, allied with the relish for a fight, inclined him to a theory of life which has been more discussed than any other phase of the poet's art and thought. It is unnecessary to dwell upon this familiar theory here, except to say that it attached immense importance to the buffetings and stumblings as a necessary part of man's progress to a higher state of existence.

Whether we respond to Browning's triumphant assurance that the discords of earth will be resolved into a perfect harmony elsewhere, and that we sleep "to wake," or whether our ultimate gesture towards life is better expressed by Tennyson's Ulysses—

> "It may be that the gulfs will wash us down,
> It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
> And see the great Achiles, whom we knew."

is immaterial to our appreciation of the ethic that permeates Browning's verse. This ethic voices the poet's conviction of the value of effort and individual energy in deepening human experience and benefiting human life. Whatever the answer to the Riddle of Life, we can all be agreed on opposing (to use Huxley's phrase) the ethical process to the cosmic process, or, to put it in terms of Browning's thought, to pit Love against Power.

Despite then the differences of opinion that must be held about Browning's religious philosophy, there can be none about his humanism. He delighted in strength, not in savagery. He respected what a man stood for, not what he formally professed. Insensitive on certain matters, he is as sensitive to the pathos and tragedy of animal life as Mr. Thomas Hardy or Mr. Ralph Hodgson. Such poems as *Tray* illustrate his views plainly. Metaphysical speculations notwithstanding, there is "always earth in sight" in his poetry.

As a singer and dramatic apologist he will never fail to delight so long as men love poetry that is rooted in reality. The world of Browning is a world where there are spaces to breathe in and vistas to look down.

ARTHUR COMPTON-RICKETT.

I. THE POET OF NATURE

"What I love best in all the world
Is a castle precipice encurled
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine."

BROWNING.

"A certain eerie playfulness is indeed a recurring trait in Browning's highly individual feeling about Nature."

PROF. C. H. HERFORD.

"No poet felt the ecstasy of mere living in Nature more deeply than Browning."

STOPFORD BROOKE.

From PARACELSUS

Tenanted by the ever-busy flies,
Grey crickets and shy lizards and quick spiders,
Each family of the silver-threaded moss—
Which, look through near, this way, and it
appears
A stubble-field or a cane-brake, a marsh
Of bulrush whitening in the sun : laugh now
Fancy the crickets, each one in his house,
Looking out, wondering at the world—or best,
Yon painted snail with his gay shell of dew,
Travelling to see the glossy balls high up
Hung by the caterpillar, like gold lamps.

Suffice, and leave him for the next at ease
Like the great palmer-worm that strips the
trees,
Eats the life out of every luscious plant,
And, when September finds them sere or scant,
Puts forth two wondrous winglets, alters quite,
And hies him after unforeseen delight.

THE OTTER

From CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

. . . . . .

Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,
Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping
thing.
Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech . . .

TRAY

Sing me a hero! Quench my thirst
Of soul, ye bards!
Quoth Bard the first:
"Sir Olaf, the good knight, did don
His helm and eke his habergeon . . ."
Sir Olaf and his bard——!

"That sin-scathed brow" (quoth Bard the second)
"That eye wide ope as though Fate beckoned
My hero to some steep, beneath
Which precipice smiled tempting death . . .
You too without your host have reckoned!

"A beggar-child" (let's hear this third!)
"Sat on a quay's edge: like a bird
Sang to herself at careless play,
And fell into the stream. 'Dismay!
'Help, you the standers-by!' None stirred.

"Bystanders reason, think of wives
And children ere they risk their lives.
Over the balustrade has bounced
A mere instinctive dog, and pounced
Plumb on the prize. 'How well he dives!

" ' Up he comes with the child, see, tight
In mouth, alive too, clutched from quite
A depth of ten feet—twelve, I bet !
Good dog ! What, off again ? There's yet
Another child to save ? All right !

" ' How strange we saw no other fall !
It's instinct in the animal.
Good dog ! But he's a long while under :
If he got drowned I should not wonder—
Strong current, that against the wall !

" ' Here he comes, holds in mouth this time
—What may the thing be ? Well, that's
prime !
Now, did you ever ? Reason reigns
In man alone, since all Tray's pains
Have fished—the child's doll from the slime ! '

" And so, amid the laughter gay,
Trotted my hero off,—old Tray,—
Till somebody, prerogatived
With reason, reasoned : 'Why he dived,
His brain would show us, I should say,

" ' John, go and catch—or, if needs be,
Purchase—that animal for me !
By vivisection, at expense
Of half-an-hour and eighteenpence,
How brain secretes dog's soul, we'll see ! ' "

Earth is a wintry clod :
But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passes
Over its breast to waken it, rare verdure
Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between
The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,
Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face ;
The grass grows bright, the boughs are swoln with blooms
Like chrysalids impatient for the air,
The shining dorrs are busy, beetles run
Along the furrows, ants make their ado ;
Above, birds fly in merry flocks, the lark
Soars up and up, shivering for very joy ;
Afar the ocean sleeps ; white fishing-gulls
Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe
Of nested limpets ; savage creatures seek
Their loves in wood and plain—and God renews
His ancient rapture.

SPRING

From SORDELLO

The woods were long austere with snow; at last
Pink leaflets budded on the beech, and fast
Larches, scattered through pine-trees solitudes,
Brightened, as in the slumbrous heart of the woods
Our buried year, a witch, grew young again
To placid incantations, and that stain
About were from her cauldron, green smoke blent
With those black pines.

HOME THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD

I

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

II

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

AUTUMN

From JAMES LEE'S WIFE

VII.—AMONG THE ROCKS

I

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

MORNING

From GERARD DE LAIRESSE

IX

But morning's laugh sets all the crags alight
Above the baffled tempest : tree and tree
Stir themselves from the stupor of the night,
And every strangled branch resumes its right
To breathe, shakes loose dark's clinging dregs, waves free
In dripping glory. Prone the runnels plunge,
While earth distent with moisture like a sponge
Smokes up, and leaves each plant its gem to see,
Each grass-blade's glory-glitter. . . .

SUNRISE

Lo, on a heathy brown and nameless hill
By sparkling Asolo, in mist and chill,
Morning just up, higher and higher runs
A child barefoot and rosy.

SUNRISE

From BERNARD DE MANDEVILLE
PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE

IX

Boundingly up through Night's wall dense and dark,
Embattled crags and clouds, outbroke the Sun
Above the conscious earth, and one by one
Her heights and depths absorbed to the last spark
His fluid glory, from the far fine ridge
Of mountain-granite which, transformed to gold,
Laughed first the thanks back, to the vale's dusk fold
On fold of vapour-swathing, like a bridge
Shattered beneath some giant's stamp.
Night wist
Her work done and betook herself in mist
To marsh and hollow there to bide her time
Blindly in acquiescence. Everywhere
Did earth acknowledge Sun's embrace sublime
Thrilling her to the heart of things: since there
No ore ran liquid, no spar branched anew,
No arrowy crystal gleamed, but straightway grew
Glad through the inrush—glad nor more nor less
Than, 'neath his gaze, forest and wilderness,
Hill, dale, land, sea, the whole vast stretch and spread,
The universal world of creatures bred
By Sun's munificence, alike gave praise.
. . . . . .

SUNRISE

From PIPPA PASSES

Day!
Faster and more fast,
O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
Where spurting and suppressed it lay,
For not a froth-flake touched the rim
Of yonder gap in the solid gray
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;
But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed
the world.

From SAUL

. . . . . .

V

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide—those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and so far!

VI

—Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another: and then, what has weight

To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside hi
sand house—
There are none such as he for a wonder, hal
bird and half mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them ou
love and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, on
family here.

SUNSET

. . . . when the sun stopped both peaks
Of the cleft belfry like a fiery wedge,
Then sank, a huge flame on its socket edge,
With leavings on the grey glass oriel-pane
Ghastly some minutes more. No fear of rain—
The minster minded that!

From SORDELLO

A last remains of sunset dimly burned
O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
In one long flare of crimson; as a brand,
The woods beneath lay black.

HOME THOUGHTS FROM THE SEA

Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North
west died away ;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking int
Cadiz Bay ;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in fac
Trafalgar lay ;
In the dimmest North-east distance dawne
Gibraltar grand and gray ;
" Here and here did England help me : ho
can I help England ? "—say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to Go
to praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent ove
Africa.

NIGHT

From PARACELSUS

. . . . See,
The night, late strewn with clouds and flying
stars,
s blank and motionless: how peaceful sleep
The tree-tops all together! Like an asp
The wind slips whispering from bough to
bough.

THE LUNAR RAINBOW

From CHRISTMAS-EVE

But lo, what think you ? Suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the West : while, bare and breathless,
North and South and East lay ready
For a glorious thing that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them and stood steady,

'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its severe proper colours chorded
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of whitest white,—
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like only the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequence,

THE LUNAR RAINBOW

Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier and flightier,—
Rapture dying along its verge.
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the key-stone of that arc ?

THE POPPY

Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone.
As if the poppy felt with him ! Though he
Partook the poppy's red effrontery
Till Autumn spoiled their fleering quite with
rain,
And, turbanless, a coarse brown rattling crane
Lay bare.

THE ROSE

And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.

II

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has furled
Her five fingers,
Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world
Where there lingers
No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her sake :
How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled on its stake !
My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks curled.

Festus : Thus the Mayne glideth
Where my Love abideth.
Sleep's no softer : it proceeds
On through lawns, on through meads,
On and on, whate'er befall,
Meandering and musical,
Though the niggard pasturage
Bears not on its shaven ledge
Aught but weeds and waving grasses
To view the river as it passes,
Save here and there a scanty patch
Of primroses too faint to catch
A weary bee.

Paracelsus : More, more ; say on !

Festus : And scarce it pushes
Its gentle way through strangling rushes
Where the glossy kingfisher
Flutters when noon-heats are near,
Glad the shelving banks to shun,
Red and steaming in the sun,
Where the shrew-mouse with pale throat
Burrows, and the speckled stoat ;
Where the quick sandpipers flit
In and out the marl and grit
That seems to breed them, brown as they :
Nought disturbs its quiet way,

Save some lazy stork that springs,
Trailing it with legs and wings,
Whom the shy fox from the hill
Rouses, creep he ne'er so still.

Mincio, in its place,
Laughed, a broad water, in next morning's face,
And, where the mists broke up immense and white
I' the steady wind, burned like a spilth of light
Out of the crashing of a myriad stars.

He climbed with (June at deep) some close
ravine
Mid clatter of its million pebbles sheen,
Over which, singing soft, the runnel slipped
Elate with rains : into whose streamlet dipped
He foot, yet trod, you thought, with unwet sock—
Though really on the stubs of living rock
Ages ago it crenelled ; vines for roof,
Lindens for wall ; before him, aye aloof,
Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly,
Born of the simmering quiet, there to die.
Emerging whence, Apollo still, he spied
Mighty descents of forest ; multiplied
Tuft on tuft, here, the frolic myrtle-trees,
There gendered the grave maple stocks at ease.
And, proud of its observer, straight the wood
Tried old surprises on him ; black it stood
A sudden barrier ('twas a cloud passed o'er)
So dead and dense, the tiniest brute no more
Must pass ; yet presently (the cloud dispatched)
Each clump, behold, was glistering detached
A shrub, oak-boles shrunk into ilex-stems !
Yet could not he denounce the stratagems
He saw thro', till, hours thence, aloft would hang
White summer-lightnings ; as it sank and sprang
To measure, that whole palpitating breast
Of heaven, 'twas Apollo, nature prest
At eve to worship.

From JAMES LEE'S WIFE

III.—IN THE DOORWAY

I

The swallow has set her six young on the rail,
And looks sea-ward :
The water's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale
To the lee-ward,—
On the weather-side, black, spotted white with the wind.
"Good fortune departs, and disaster's behind,"—
Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail !

From STRAFFORD

—To breast the bloody sea
That sweeps before me: with one star for guide.
Night has its first, supreme, forsaken star.

ITALIAN LANDSCAPE

From THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,
And place was e'en grudged
'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones
Like the loose broken teeth
Of some monster which climbed there to die
From the ocean beneath—
Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed
That clung to the path,
And dark rosemary ever a-dying
That, 'spite the wind's wrath,
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,
And lentisks as staunch
To the stone where they root and bear berries,
And . . . what shows a branch
Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets
Of pale sea-green leaves.

ITALIAN AND ENGLISH LANDSCAPE CONTRASTED

DE GUSTIBUS

I

Your ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
(If our loves remain)
In an English lane,
By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.
Hark, those two in the hazel coppice—
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,
Making love, say,—
The happier they!
Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,
And let them pass, as they will too soon,
With the bean-flowers' boon,
And the blackbird's tune,
And May, and June!

II

What I love best in all the world
Is a castle, precipice-encurled,
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.
Or look for me, old fellow of mine,
(If I get my head from out the mouth
O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,
And come again to the land of lands)—
In a sea-side house to the farther South,
Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,

And one sharp tree—'tis a cypress—stands,
By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted,
My sentinel to guard the sands
To the water's edge. For, what expands
Before the house, but the great opaque
Blue breadth of sea without a break ?
While, in the house, for ever crumbles
Some fragment of the frescoed walls,
From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.
A girl bare-footed brings, and tumbles
Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,
And says there's news to-day—the king
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,
Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling :
—She hopes they have not caught the felons.
Italy, my Italy !
Queen Mary's saying serves for me—
(When fortune's malice
Lost her—Calais)—
Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, " Italy."
Such lovers old are I and she :
So it always was, so shall ever be !

I.—THE POET OF MEN AND WOMEN

ince Chaucer was alive and hale
o man hath walked along our roads with step
o active, so inquiring eye or tongue,
o varied in discourse.

W. S. Landor.

Ie took such cognisance of men and things—
centing the world, looking it full in face.

How it strikes a Contemporary.

The best
mpart the gift of seeing to the rest :
So that I glance," says such an one, " around
nd there's no face but I can read profound
isclosure in."

Sordello.

our business is to paint the souls of men.

Fra Lippo Lippi.

THE ARTIST

From OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

I

The morn when first it thunders in March,
The eel in the pond gives a leap, they say
As I leaned and looked over the aloed arch
Of the villa-gate this warm March day,
No flash snapped, no dumb thunder rolled
In the valley beneath where, white and wid
And washed by the morning water-gold,
Florence lay out on the mountain-side.

II

River and bridge and street and square
Lay mine, as much at my beck and call,
Through the live translucent bath of air,
As the sights in a magic crystal ball.
And of all I saw and of all I praised,
The most to praise and the best to see
Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised :
But why did it more than startle me ?

III

Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,
Could you play me false who loved you so
Some slights if a certain heart endures
Yet it feels, I would have your fellows know
I' faith, I perceive not why I should care
To break a silence that suits them best,
But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear
When I find a Giotto join the rest.

IV

n the arch where olives overhead
Print the blue sky with twig and leaf,
'hat sharp-curled leaf which they never shed)
'Twixt the aloes, I used to lean in chief,
nd mark through the winter afternoons,
By a gift God grants me now and then,
n the mild decline of those suns like moons,
Who walked in Florence, besides her men.

V

hey might chirp and chaffer, come and go
For pleasure or profit, her men alive—
Iy business was hardly with them, I trow,
But with empty cells of the human hive ;
—With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,
The church's apsis, aisle or nave,
ts crypt, one fingers along with a torch,
Its face set full for the sun to shave.

VI

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,
Wherever an outline weakens and wanes
'ill the latest life in the painting stops,
Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains :
)ne, wishful each scrap should clutch the brick,
Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,
—A lion who dies of an ass's kick,
The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.

VII

For oh, this world and the wrong it does!
They are safe in heaven with their backs to it
The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz
Round the works of, you of the little wit
Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope
Now that they see God face to face,
And have all attained to be poets, I hope?
'Tis their holiday now, in any case.

VIII

Much they reck of your praise and you!
But the wronged great souls—can they b
quit
Of a world where their work is all to do,
Where you style them, you of the little wit
Old Master This and Early the Other,
Not dreaming that Old and New are fellows
A younger succeeds to an older brother,
Da Vincis derive in good time from Dello

IX

And here where your praise might yiel
returns,
And a handsome word or two give help,
Here, after your kind, the mastiff girns
And the puppy pack of poodles yelp.
What, not a word for Stefano there,
Of brow once prominent and starry,
Called Nature's Ape and the world's despair
For his peerless painting? (See Vasari.)

X

There stands the Master. Study, my friends,
What a man's work comes to! So he plans it,
Performs it, perfects it, makes amends
For the toiling and moiling, and then, *sic transit!*
Happier the thrifty blind-folk labour,
With upturned eye while the hand is busy,
Not sidling a glance at the coin of their neighbour!
'Tis looking downward that makes one dizzy.

. . . . . .

YOUTH AND ART

I

It once might have been, once only:
We lodged in a street together,
You, a sparrow on the housetop lonely,
I, a lone she-bird of his feather.

II

Your trade was with sticks and clay,
You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,
Then laughed "They will see some day
"Smith made, and Gibson demolished."

III

My business was song, song, song;
I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered,
"Kate Brown's on the boards ere long,
"And Grisi's existence embittered!"

IV

I earned no more by a warble
Than you by a sketch in plaster;
You wanted a piece of marble,
I needed a music-master.

V

We studied hard in our styles,
Chipped each at a crust like Hindoos,
For air looked out on the tiles,
For fun watched each other's windows.

VI

You lounged, like a boy of the South,
Cap and blouse, nay, a bit of a beard too;
Or you got it, rubbing your mouth
With fingers the clay adhered to.

VII

And I—soon managed to find
Weak points in the flower-fence facing,
Was forced to put up a blind
And be safe in my corset-lacing.

VIII

No harm! It was not my fault
If you never turned your eye's tail up
As I shook upon E *in alt*,
Or ran the chromatic scale up:

IX

For spring bade the sparrows pair,
And the boys and girls gave guesses,
And stalls in our street looked rare
With bulrush and watercresses.

X

Why did not you pinch a flower
In a pellet of clay and fling it?
Why did not I put a power
Of thanks in a look, or sing it?

XI

I did look, sharp as a lynx,
(And yet the memory rankles)
When models arrived, some minx
Tripped upstairs, she and her ankles.

XII

But I think I gave you as good!
"That foreign fellow,—who can know
"How she pays, in a playful mood,
"For his tuning her that piano?"

XIII

Could you say so, and never say
"Suppose we join hands and fortunes,
"And I fetch her from over the way,
"Her, piano, and long tunes and short tunes?"

XIV

No, no: you would not be rash,
Nor I rasher and something over:
You've to settle yet Gibson's hash,
And Grisi yet lives in clover.

XV

But you meet the Prince at the Board,
I'm queen myself at *bals-paré*,
I've married a rich old lord,
And you're dubbed knight and an R.A.

XVI

Each life unfulfilled, you see;
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
Starved, feasted, despaired—been happy.

XVII

And nobody calls you a dunce,
And people suppose me clever:
This could but have happened once,
And we missed it, lost it for ever.

From CHARLES AVISON*

PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE

VIII

All Arts endeavour this, and she the most
Attains thereto, yet fails of touching: why?
Does Mind get Knowledge from Art's ministry?
What's known once is known ever: Arts arrange,
Dissociate, re-distribute, interchange
Part with part, lengthen, broaden, high or deep
Construct their bravest,—still such pains produce
Change, not creation: simply what lay loose
At first lies firmly after, what design
Was faintly traced in hesitating line
Once on a time, grows firmly resolute
Henceforth and evermore. Now, could we shoot
Liquidity into a mould,—some way
Arrest Soul's evanescent moods, and keep
Unalterably still the forms that leap
To life for once by help of Art!—which yearns
To save its capture: Poetry discerns,
Painting is 'ware of passion's rise and fall,
Bursting, subsidence, intermixture—all
A-seethe within the gulf. Each Art a-strain

* An English musical composer, *d.* 1770.

Would stay the apparition,—nor in vain :
The Poet's word-mesh, Painter's sure and swift
Colour-and-line-throw—proud the prize they lift !
Thus felt Man and thus looked Man,—passions caught
I' the midway swim of sea,—not much, if aught,
Of nether-brooding loves, hates, hopes and fears,
Enwombed past Art's disclosure. Fleet the years,
And still the Poet's page holds Helena
At gaze from topmost Troy—" But where are they,
My brothers, in the armament I name
Hero by hero ? Can it be that shame
For their lost sister holds them from the war ? "
—Knowing not they already slept afar
Each of them in his own dear native land.
Still on the Painter's fresco, from the hand
Of God takes Eve the life-spark whereunto
She trembles up from nothingness. Outdo
Both of them, Music ! Dredging deeper yet,
Drag into day,—by sound, thy master-net,—
The abysmal bottom-growth, ambiguous thing
Unbroken of a branch, palpitating
With limbs' play and life's semblance ! There it lies,
Marvel and mystery, of mysteries
And marvels, most to love and laud thee for !
Save it from chance and change we most abhor !

Give momentary feeling permanence,
So that thy capture hold, a century hence,
Truth's very heart of truth as, safe to-day,
The Painter's Eve, the Poet's Helena,
Still rapturously bend, afar still throw
The wistful gaze! Thanks, Homer, Angelo!
Could Music rescue thus from Soul's profound,
Give feeling immortality by sound,
Then were she queenliest of Arts! Alas—
As well expect the rainbow not to pass!
"Praise, 'Radaminta,'—love attains therein
To perfect utterance! Pity—what shall win
Thy secret like 'Rinaldo'?"—so men said:
Once all was perfume—now, the flower is dead—
They spied tints, sparks have left the spar!
Love, hate,
Joy, fear, survive,—alike importunate
As ever to go walk the world again,
Nor ghost-like pant for outlet all in vain
Till Music loose them, fit each filmily
With form enough to know and name it by
For any recognizer sure of ken
And sharp of ear, no grosser denizen
Of earth than needs be. Nor to such appeal
Is Music long obdurate: off they steal—
How gently, dawn-doomed phantoms! back come they
Full-blooded with new crimson of broad day—
Passion made palpable once more. Ye look

Your last on Handel? Gaze your first on
Gluck!
Why wistful search, O waning ones, the chart
Of stars for you while Haydn, while Mozart
Occupies heaven? These also, fanned to fire,
Flamboyant wholly,—so perfections tire,—
Whiten to wanness, till . . . let others note
The ever-new invasion!

. . . . . .

From FRA LIPPO LIPPI

(Florentine painter, 1412–1469)

Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man's soul . . .
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That's somewhat: . . .

. . . The world
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!

ANDREA DEL SARTO

(*Called "The Faultless Painter"*)

(Famous painter, died 1531, aged 43)

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love!
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,

And mine the man's bared breast she curls
inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither; you must
serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so—
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
—How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet—
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks—no one's: very dear, no less.
You smile? why, there's my picture ready
made,
There's what we painters call our harmony!
A common greyness silvers everything,—
All in a twilight, you and I alike
—You, at the point of your first pride in me
That's gone you know),—but I, at every
point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned
down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days
decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.

Eh ? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are !
I feel he laid the fetter : let it lie !
This chamber for example—turn your head—
All that's behind us ! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak
And that cartoon, the second from the door
—It is the thing, Love ! so such things should
be—
Behold Madonna !—I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps : yourself are judge
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week
And just as much they used to say in France
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it !
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
—Dream ? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town
Who strive—you don't know how the others
strive

To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter)—so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word—
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse
I know both what I want and what might
gain,
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
"Our head would have o'erlooked the world!"
No doubt.
Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me).
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him
Above and through his art—for it gives way
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird

The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory! never care for gain.
"The present by the future, what is that?
"Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
"Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"
I might have done it for you. So it seems:
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside;
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,

And that long festal year at Fontainebleau !
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward !
A good time, was it not, my kingly days ?
And had you not grown restless . . . but I know—
'Tis done and past ; 'twas right, my instinct said ;
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way ?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.

The triumph was—to reach and stay there; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
"The Roman's is the better when you pray,
"But still the other's Virgin was his wife——"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
"Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
"Who, were he set to plan and execute
"As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
"Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,

Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line
should go!
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
Do you forget already words like those?
If really there was such a chance, so lost,—
Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more
pleased.
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch'lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you—you, and not with me? Those
loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?

Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to
spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it
worth?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The grey remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them—that is, Michael Agnolo—
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,
Finish the portrait out of hand—there—
there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What's better and what's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what
does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little. I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis!—it is true

I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own ? you see
How one gets rich ! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died :
And I have laboured somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try !
No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have ?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover—the three first without a wife,
While I have mine ! So—still they overcome
Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle ! Go, my Love.

SHOP

I

So, friend, your shop was all your house!
Its front, astonishing the street,
Invited view from man and mouse
To what diversity of treat
Behind its glass—the single sheet!

II

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese:
Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog;
Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geese;
Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog:
Queer names, too, such a catalogue!

III

I thought "And he who owns the wealth
Which blocks the window's vastitude,
—Ah, could I peep at him by stealth
Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude
On house itself, what scenes were viewed!

IV

"If wide and showy thus the shop,
What must the habitation prove?

The true house with no name a-top—
The mansion, distant one remove,
Once get him off his traffic-groove!

V

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;
And as for buying most and best,
Commend me to these City chaps!
Or else he's social, takes his rest
On Sundays, with a Lord for guest.

VI

"Some suburb-palace, parked about
And gated grandly, built last year:
The four-mile walk to keep off gout;
Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:
But then he takes the rail, that's clear.

VII

"Or, stop! I wager, taste selects
Some out o' the way, some all-unknown
Retreat: the neighbourhood suspects
Little that he who rambles lone
Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!"

VIII

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence
Fit to receive and entertain,—

Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence
From noise and crowd, from dust and drain,—
Nor country-box was soul's domain!

IX

Nowise! At back of all that spread
Of merchandise, woe's me, I find
A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,
The owner couched, his ware behind,
—In cupboard suited to his mind.

X

For why? He saw no use of life
But, while he drove a roaring trade,
To chuckle "Customers are rife!"
To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid
Yet zero in my profits made!

XI

"This novelty costs pains, but—takes?
Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!
This article, no such great shakes,
Fizzes like wildfire? Underscore
The cheap thing—thousands to the fore!"

XII

'Twas lodging best to live most nigh
(Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)

Receipt of Custom ; ear and eye
Wanted no outworld : " Hear and see
The bustle in the shop ! " quoth he.

XIII

My fancy of a merchant-prince
Was different. Through his wares we groped
Our darkling way to—not to mince
The matter—no black den where moped
The master if we interloped !

XIV

Shop was shop only : household-stuff ?
What did he want with comforts there ?
" Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,
So goods on sale show rich and rare !
' *Sell and scud home* ' be shop's affair ! "

XV

What might he deal in ? Gems, suppose !
Since somehow business must be done
At cost of trouble,—see, he throws
You choice of jewels, everyone,
Good, better, best, star, moon and sun !

XVI

Which lies within your power of purse ?
This ruby that would tip aright

Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse
Wants simply coral, the delight
Of teething baby,—stuff to bite!

XVII

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took
Your purchase, prompt your money rang
On counter,—scarce the man forsook
His study of the *Times*, just swang
Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang,—

XVIII

Then off made buyer with a prize,
Then seller to his *Times* returned;
And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
Brightened apace, for rest was earned:
He locked door long ere candle burned.

XIX

And whither went he? Ask himself,
Not me! To change of scene, I think.
Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,
Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,
Nor all his music—money-chink.

XX

Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,

Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give ?

XXI

I want to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute !

XXII

But—stop each day and all day long !
Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong !
From where these sorts of treasures are,
There should our hearts be—Christ, how far !

THE LABORATORY*

(*Ancien Régime*)

I

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee ?

II

He is with her, and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do : they believe my tears flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them !—I am here.

III

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder,—I am not in haste !
Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

* Age of the Renascence.

IV

That in the mortar—you call it a gum ?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings
come !
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly,—is that poison too ?

V

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures !
To carry pure death in an ear-ring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket !

VI

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give,
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes
to live !
But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands
should drop dead !

VII

Quick—is it finished ? The colour's too grim !
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer !

VIII

What a drop ! She's not little, no minion like me
That's why she ensnared him : this never will fre
The soul from those masculine eyes,—say, "no!
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

IX

or only last night, as they whispered, I
brought
y own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
ould I keep them one half minute fixed,
she would fall
hrivelled ; she fell not ; yet this does it all !

X

ot that I bid you spare her the pain ;
et death be felt and the proof remain :
rand, burn up, bite into its grace—
e is sure to remember her dying face !

XI

s it done ? Take my mask off ! Nay, be not
morose ;
t kills her, and this prevents seeing it close :
he delicate droplet, my whole fortune's
fee !
f it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me ?

XII

ow, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your
fill,
ou may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if
you will !
ut brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
re I know it—next moment I dance at the
King's !

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH

[Rome, 15—]

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity !
Draw round my bed : is Anselm keeping back
Nephews—sons mine . . . ah God, I kno
not ! Well—
She, men would have to be your mother onc
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was !
What's done is done, and she is dead beside
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's
dream.
Life, how and what is it ? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I as
" Do I live, am I dead ? " Peace, peace seem
all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know
—Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care ;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corne
South
He graced his carrion with, God curse th
same !

et still my niche is not so cramped but thence
ne sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
nd somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
nd up into the aery dome where live
he angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk :
nd I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
nd 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
Vith those nine columns round me, two and two,
he odd one at my feet where Anselm stands :
each-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
s fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
ut me where I may look at him ! True peach,
osy and flawless : how I earned the prize !
raw close : that conflagration of my church
—What then ? So much was saved if aught were missed !
Iy sons, ye would not be my death ? Go dig
he white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
rop water gently till the surface sink,
nd if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I ! . . .
edded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
nd corded up in a tight olive-frail,
ome lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
ig as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
lue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
ons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,

That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesus Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and
burst !
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years :
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he ?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons ? Black—
'Twas ever antique-black I meant ! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and per
chance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not ! What do they whisper thee
Child of my bowels, Anselm ? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at
Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then !
'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve.
My bath must needs be left behind, alas !
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray

Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs ?
—That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
Tully, my masters ? Ulpian serves his need !
And then how I shall lie through centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the Mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke !
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
And let the bedcloths, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work :
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
—Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend ?

No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me,
there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone—
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which
sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing
through—
And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
Well go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
—Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for
peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!

WARING

I

What's become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip,
Chose land-travel or seafaring,
Boots and chest or staff and scrip,
Rather than pace up and down
Any longer London town ?

II

Who'd have guessed it from his lip
Or his brow's accustomed bearing,
On the night he thus took ship
Or started landward ?—little caring
For us, it seems, who supped together
(Friends of his too, I remember)
And walked home thro' the merry weather,
The snowiest in all December.
I left his arm that night myself
For what's-his-name's, the new prose-poet
Who wrote the book there, on the shelf—
How, forsooth, was I to know it
If Waring meant to glide away
Like a ghost at break of day ?
Never looked he half so gay !

III

He was prouder than the devil :
How he must have cursed our revel !

Ay and many other meetings,
Indoor visits, outdoor greetings,
As up and down he paced this London,
With no work done, but great works undone,
Where scarce twenty knew his name.
Why not, then, have earlier spoken,
Written, bustled ? Who's to blame
If your silence kept unbroken ?
" True, but there were sundry jottings,
" Stray-leaves, fragments, blurrs and blottings,
" Certain first steps were achieved
" Already which "—(is that your meaning ?)
" Had well borne out who'er believed
" In come to come ! " But who goes gleaning
Hedgeside chance-glades, while full-sheaved
Stand cornfields by him ? Pride, o'erweening
Pride alone, puts forth such claims
O'er the day's distinguished names.

IV

Meantime, how much I loved him,
I find out now I've lost him.
I who cared not if I moved him.
Who could so carelessly accost him,
Henceforth never shall get free
Of his ghostly company,
His eyes that just a little wink
As deep I go into the merit

Of this and that distinguished spirit—
His cheeks' raised colour, soon to sink,
As long I dwell on some stupendous
And tremendous (Heaven defend us !)
Monstr'-inform'-ingens-horrend-ous
Demoniaco-seraphic
Penman's latest piece of graphic.
Nay, my very wrist grows warm
With his dragging weight of arm.
E'en so, swimmingly appears,
Through one's after-supper musings,
Some lost lady of old years
With her beauteous vain endeavour
And goodness unrepaid as ever ;
The face, accustomed to refusings,
We, puppies that we were . . . Oh never
Surely, nice of conscience, scrupled
Being aught like false, forsooth, to ?
Telling aught but honest truth to ?
What a sin, had we centupled
Its possessor's grace and sweetness !
No ! she heard in its completeness
Truth, for truth's a weighty matter,
And truth, at issue, we can't flutter !
Well, 'tis done with ; she's exempt
From damning us thro' such a sally ;
And so she glides, as down a valley,
Taking up with her contempt,
Past our reach ; and in, the flowers
Shut her unregarded hours.

V

Oh, could I have him back once more,
This Waring, but one half-day more!
Back, with the quiet face of yore,
So hungry for acknowledgment
Like mine! I'd fool him to his bent.
Feed, should not he, to heart's content?
I'd say, "to only have conceived,
"Planned your great works, apart from progress,
"Surpasses little works achieved!"
I'd lie so, I should be believed.
I'd make such havoc of the claims
Of the day's distinguished names
To feast him with, as feasts an ogress
Her feverish sharp-toothed gold-crowned child!
Or as one feasts a creature rarely
Captured here, unreconciled
To capture; and completely gives
Its pettish humours license, barely
Requiring that it lives.

VI

Ichabod, Ichabod,
The glory is departed!
Travels Waring East away?
Who, of knowledge, by hearsay,
Reports a man upstarted
Somewhere as a god,
Hordes grown European-hearted,

Millions of the wild made tame
On a sudden at his fame ?
In Vishnu-land what Avatar ?
Or who in Moscow, toward the Czar,
With the demurest of footfalls
Over the Kremlin's pavement bright
With serpentine and syenite,
Steps, with five other Generals
That simultaneously take snuff,
For each to have pretext enough
And kerchiefwise unfold his sash
Which, softness' self, is yet the stuff
To hold fast where a steel chain snaps,
And leave the grand white neck no gash ?
Waring in Moscow, to those rough
Cold northern natures born perhaps,
Like the lamb-white maiden dear
From the circle of mute kings
Unable to repress the tear,
Each as his sceptre down he flings,
To Dian's fane at Taurica,
Where now a captive priestess, she alway
Mingles her tender grave Hellenic speech
With theirs, tuned to the hailstone-beaten
beach
As pours some pigeon, from the myrrhy lands
Rapt by the whirlblast to fierce Scythian
strands
Where breed the swallows, her melodious cry
Amid their barbarous twitter !

In Russia? Never! Spain were fitter!
Ay, most likely 'tis in Spain
That we and Waring meet again
Now, while he turns down that cool narrow lane
Into the blackness, out of grave Madrid
All fire and shine, abrupt as when there's slid
Its stiff gold blazing pall
From some black coffin-lid.
Or, best of all,
I love to think
That leaving us was just a feint;
Back here to London did he slink,
And now works on without a wink
Of sleep, and we are on the brink
Of something great in fresco-paint:
Some garret's ceiling, walls and floor,
Up and down and o'er and o'er
He splashes, as none splashed before
Since great Caldara Polidore.
Or Music means this land of ours
Some favour yet, to pity won
By Purcell from his Rosy Bowers,—
"Give me my so-long promised son,
"Let Waring end what I begun!"
Then down he creeps and out he steals
Only when the night conceals
His face; in Kent 'tis cherry-time,
Or hops are picking: or at prime
Of March he wanders as, too happy,

Years ago when he was young,
Some mild eve when woods grew sappy
And the early moths had sprung
To life from many a trembling sheath
Woven the warm boughs beneath ;
While small birds said to themselves
What should soon be actual song,
And young gnats, by tens and twelves,
Made as if they were the throng
That crowd around and carry aloft
The sound they have nursed, so sweet and pure,
Out of a myriad noises soft,
Into a tone that can endure
Amid the noise of a July noon
When all God's creatures crave their boon,
All at once and all in tune,
And get it, happy as Waring then,
Having first within his ken
What a man might do with men :
And far too glad, in the even-glow,
To mix with the world he meant to take
Into his hand, he told you, so—
And out of it his world to make,
To contract and to expand
As he shut or oped his hand.
Oh Waring, what's to really be ?
A clear stage and a crowd to see !
Some Garrick, say, out shall not be
The heart of Hamlet's mystery pluck ?

Or, where most unclean beasts are rife,
Some Junius—am I right ?—shall tuck
His sleeve, and forth with flaying-knife !
Some Chatterton shall have the luck
Of calling Rowley into life !
Someone shall somehow run amuck
With this old world for want of strife
Sound asleep. Contrive, contrive
To rouse us, Waring ! Who's alive ?
Our men scarce seem in earnest now.
Distinguished names !—but 'tis, somehow,
As if they played at being names
Still more distinguished, like the games
Of children. Turn our sport to earnest
With a visage of the sternest !
Bring the real times back, confessed
Still better than our very best !

DIS ALITER VISUM ; OR LE BYRON DE NOS JOURS

I

Stop, let me have the truth of that !
  Is that all true ? I say, the day
Ten years ago when both of us
  Met on a morning, friends—as thus
We meet this evening, friends or what ?—

II

Did you—because I took your arm
  And sillily smiled, " A mass of brass
" That sea looks, blazing underneath ! "
  While up the cliff-road edged with heath,
  We took the turns nor came to harm—

III

Did you consider " Now makes twice
  " That I have seen her, walked and talked
" With this poor pretty thoughtful thing,
  " Whose worth I weigh : she tries to sing ;
" Draws, hopes in time the eye grows nice ;

IV

" Reads verse and thinks she understands ;
  " Loves all, at any rate, that's great,
" Good, beautiful ; but much as we
  " Down at the bath-house love the sea,
" Who breathe its salt and bruise its sands :

V

" While . . . do but follow the fishing-gull
" That flaps and floats from wave to cave !
" There's the sea-lover, fair my friend !
" What then ? Be patient, mark and mend !
" Had you the making of your scull ? "

VI

And did you, when we faced the church
With spire and sad slate roof, aloof
From human fellowship so far,
Where a few graveyard crosses are,
And garlands for the swallow's perch,—

VII

Did you determine, as we stepped
O'er the lone stone fence, " Let me get
" Her for myself, and what's the earth
" With all its art, verse, music, worth—
" Compared with love, found, gained, and kept ?

VIII

" Schumann's our music-maker now ;
" Has his march-movement youth and mouth ?
" Ingres's the modern man that paints ;
" Which will lean on me, of his saints ?
" Heine for songs ; for kisses, how ? "

IX

And did you, when we entered, reached
The votive frigate, soft aloft
Riding on air this hundred years,
Safe-smiling at old hopes and fears,—
Did you draw profit while she preached ?

X

Resolving, " Fools we wise men grow !
" Yes, I could easily blurt out curt
" Some question that might find reply
" As prompt in her stopped lips, dropped eye,
" And rush of red to cheek and brow :

XI

" Thus were a match made, sure and fast,
" 'Mid the blue weed-flowers round the mound
" Where, issuing, we shall stand and stay
" For one more look at baths and bay,
" Sands, sea-gulls, and the old church last—

XII

" A match 'twixt me, bent, wigged and lamed,
" Famous, however, for verse and worse,
" Sure of the Fortieth spare Arm-chair
" When gout and glory seat me there,
" So, one whose love-freaks pass unblamed,—

XIII

" And this young beauty, round and sound
" As a mountain-apple, youth and truth
" With loves and doves, at all events
" With money in the Three per Cents ;
" Whose choice of me would seem profound :—

XIV

" She might take me as I take her.
" Perfect the hour would pass, alas !
" Climb high, love high, what matter ? Still,
" Feet, feelings, must descend the hill :
" An hour's perfection can't recur.

XV

" Then follows Paris and full time
" For both to reason : ' Thus with us ! '
" She'll sigh, ' Thus girls give body and soul
" " ' At first word, think they gain the goal,
" " ' When 'tis the starting-place they climb !

XVI

" " ' My friend makes verse and gets renown ;
" " ' Have they all fifty years, his peers ?
" " ' He knows the world, firm, quiet and gay ;
" " ' Boys will become as much one day :
" " ' They're fools ; he cheats, with beard less brown.

XVII

'For boys say, *Love me or I die!*
"'He did not say, *The truth is, youth*
'*I want, who am old and know too much;*
"'*I'd catch youth: lend me sight and touch!*
'*Drop heart's blood where life's wheels grate dry!*'

XVIII

'While I should make rejoinder "—(then
It was, no doubt, you ceased that least
Light pressure of my arm in yours)
"'I can conceive of cheaper cures
'For a yawning-fit o'er books and men.

XIX

'What? All I am, was, and might be,
"'All, books taught, art brought, life's whole strife,
'Painful results since precious, just
"'Were fitly exchanged, in wise disgust,
'For two cheeks freshened by youth and sea?

XX

'All for a nosegay!—what came first;
"'With fields on flower, untried each side;
'I rally, need my books and men,
"'And find a nosegay': drop it, then,
No match yet made for best or worst!"

XXI

That ended me. You judged the porch
We left by, Norman ; took our look
At sea and sky ; wondered so few
Find out the place for air and view ;
Remarked the sun began to scorch ;

XXII

Descended, soon regained the baths,
And then, good-bye ! Years ten since then
Ten years ! We meet : you tell me, now,
By a window-seat for that cliff-brow,
On carpet-stripes for those sand-paths.

XXIII

Now I may speak : you fool, for all
Your love ! Who made things plain in
vain ?
What was the sea for ? What, the grey
Sad church, that solitary day,
Crosses and graves and swallows' call ?

XXIV

Was there nought better than to enjoy ?
No feat which, done, would make time break
And let us pent-up creatures through
Into eternity, our due ?
No forcing earth teach heaven's employ ?

XXV

No wise beginning, here and now,
What cannot grow complete (earth's feat)
And heaven must finish, there and then ?
No tasting earth's true food for men,
Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet ?

XXVI

No grasping at love, gaining a share
O' the sole spark from God's life at strife
With death, so, sure of range above
The limits here ? For us and love,
Failure ; but, when God fails, despair.

XXVII

This you call wisdom ? Thus you add
Good unto good again, in vain ?
You loved, with body worn and weak ;
I loved, with faculties to seek :
Were both loves worthless since ill-clad ?

XXVIII

Let the mere star-fish in his vault
Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,
Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips ;
He, whole in body and soul, outstrips
Man, found with either in default.

XXIX

But what's whole, can increase no more,
Is dwarfed and dies, since here's its sphere
The devil laughed at you in his sleeve !
You knew not ? That I well believe ;
Or you had saved two souls : nay, four.

XXX

For Stephanie sprained last night her wrist,
Ankle or something. " Pooh," cry you ?
At any rate she danced, all say,
Vilely ; her vogue has had its day.
Here comes my husband from his whist.

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

There's a palace in Florence, the world knows
well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do our townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,
At the farthest window facing the East
Asked, " Who rides by with the royal air ? "

The bridesmaids' prattle around her ceased ;
She leaned forth, one on either hand ;
They saw how the blush of the bride increased—

They felt by its beats her heart expand—
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, " The Great-Duke Ferdinand."

That self-same instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back—" Who is she ? "
—" A bride the Riccardi brings home to-day."

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure—
Carved like the heart of a coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure—
And vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man,—
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

He looked at her, as a lover can ;
She looked at him, as one who awakes :
The past was a sleep, and her life began.

Now, love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite !

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursed son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square)
Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued—

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor—
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word ?
If a word did pass, which I do not think,
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bedchamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalk repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the East,
She could watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,
And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

" Freely I choose too," said the bride—
" Your window and its world suffice,"
Replied the tongue, while the heart replied—

" If I spend the night with that devil twice,
" May his window serve as my loop of hell
" Whence a damned soul looks on paradise !

" I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
" Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
" Ere I count another ave-bell.

" 'Tis only the coat of a page to borrow,
" And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim,
" And I save my soul—but not to-morrow "—

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)
" My father tarries to bless my state :
" I must keep it one day more for him.

" Is one day more so long to wait ?
" Moreover the Duke rides past, I know ;
" We shall see each other, sure as fate."

She turned on her side and slept. Just so !
So we resolve on a thing and sleep :
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, " Dear or cheap
" As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
" To body or soul, I will drain it deep."

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove)

And smiled " 'Twas a very funeral,
" Your lady will think, this feast of ours,—
" A shame to efface, whate'er befall !

" What if we break from the Arno bowers,
" And try if Petraja, cool and green,
" Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers ? "

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, " Too much favour for me so mean !

" But alas ! my lady leaves the South ;
" Each wind that comes from the Apennine
" Is a menace to her tender youth :

" Nor a way exists, the wise opine,
" If she quits her palace twice this year,
" To avert the flower of life's decline."

Quoth the Duke, " A sage and a kindly fear.
" Moreover Petraja is cold this spring :
" Be our feast to-night as usual here ! "

And then to himself—" Which night shall bring
" Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool—
" Or I am the fool, and thou art the king !

" Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—
" For to-night the Envoy arrives from France
" Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

" I need thee still and might miss perchance.
" To-day is not wholly lost, beside,
" With its hope of my lady's countenance :

" For I ride—what should I do but ride ?
" And passing her palace, if I list,
" May glance at its window—well betide ! "

So said, so done : nor the lady missed
One ray that broke from the ardent brow,
Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,
No morrow's sun should arise and set
And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,
With still fresh cause to wait one day more
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love's brief morning wore,
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
But not in despite of heaven and earth :
The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
By store of fruits that supplant the rose :
The world and its ways have a certain worth :

And to press a point while these oppose
Were simple policy ; better wait ;
We lose no friends and we gain no foes.

Meantime, worse fates than a lover's fate,
Who daily may ride and pass and look
Where his lady watches behind the grate !

And she—she watched the square like a book,
Holding one picture and only one,
Which daily to find she undertook :

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from the picture at night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

So weeks grew months, years ; gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from their youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream ;

Which hovered as dreams do, still above :
But who can take a dream for a truth ?
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove !

One day as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked—
And wondered who the woman was,
Hollow-eyed and haggard-cheeked,

Fronting her silent in the glass—
" Summon here," she suddenly said,
" Before the rest of my old self pass.

" Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,
" Who fashions the clay no love will change,
" And fixes a beauty never to fade.

" Let Robbia's craft so apt and strange
" Arrest the remains of young and fair,
" And rivet them while the seasons range.

" Make me a face on the window there,
" Waiting as ever, mute the while,
" My love to pass below in the square !

" And let me think that it may beguile
" Dreary days which the dead must spend
" Down in their darkness under the aisle,

" To say, ' What matters it at the end ?
" ' I did no more while my heart was warm
" ' Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.'

" Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
" The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
" And the blood that blues the inside arm—

" Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
" The earthly gift to an end divine ?
" A lady of clay is as good, I trow."

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine,
With flowers and fruits which leaves enlace,
Was set where now is the empty shrine—

(And, leaning out of a bright blue space,
As a ghost might lean from a chink of sky,
The passionate pale lady's face—

Eyeing ever, with earnest eye
And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,
Some one who ever is passing by—)

The Duke had sighed like the simplest wretch
In Florence, " Youth—my dream escapes !
" Will its record stay ? " And he bade them fetch

Some subtle moulder of brazen shapes—
" Can the soul, the will, die out of a man
" Ere his body find the grave that gapes ?

" John of Douay shall effect my plan,
" Set me on horseback here aloft,
" Alive, as the crafty sculptor can.

" In the very square I have crossed so oft :
" That men may admire, when future suns
" Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

" While the mouth and the brow stay brave in
bronze—
" Admire and say, ' When he was alive
" ' How he would take his pleasure once ! '

" And it shall go hard but I contrive
" To listen the while, and laugh in my tomb
" At idleness which aspires to strive."

So ! While these wait the trump of doom,
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room ?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Only they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of his,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way thro' the world to this

I hear you reproach, "But delay was best,
"For their end was a crime."—Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view!

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?
Where a button goes, 'twere an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

The true has no value beyond the sham:
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table's a hat, and your prize a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play!—is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.
You of the virtue (we issue join)
How strive you? *De te, fabula!*

THE CONFESSIONAL

(Spain)

I

It is a lie—their Priests, their Pope,
Their Saints, their . . . all they fear or hop
Are lies, and lies—there ! through my doo
And ceiling, there ! and walls and floor,
There, lies, they lie—shall still be hurled
Till spite of them I reach the world !

II

You think Priests just and holy men !
Before they put me in this den
I was a human creature too,
With flesh and blood like one of you,
A girl that laughed in beauty's pride
Like lilies in your world outside.

III

I had a lover—shame avaunt !
This poor wrenched body, grim and gaunt,
Was kissed all over till it burned,
By lips the truest, love e'er turned
His heart's own tint : one night they kisse
My soul out in a burning mist

IV

So, next day when the accustomed train
Of things grew round my sense again,
" That is a sin," I said : and slow
With downcast eyes to church I go,
And pass to the confession-chair,
And tell the old mild father there.

V

But when I falter Beltran's name,
" Ha ? " quoth the father ; " much I blame
" The sin ; yet wherefore idly grieve ?
" Despair not—strenuously retrieve !
" Nay, I will turn this love of thine
" To lawful love, almost divine ;

VI

" For he is young, and led astray,
" This Beltran, and he schemes, men say,
" To change the laws of church and state ;
" So, thine shall be an angel's fate,
" Who, ere the thunder breaks, should roll
" Its cloud away and save his soul.

VII

" For, when he lies upon thy breast,
" Thou mayst demand and be possessed
" Of all his plans, and next day steal

" To me, and all those plans reveal,
" That I and every priest, to purge
" His soul, may fast and use the scourge."

VIII

That father's beard was long and white,
With love and truth his brow seemed
bright ;
I went back, all on fire with joy,
And, that same evening, bade the boy
Tell me, as lovers should, heart-free,
Something to prove his love of me.

IX

He told me what he would not tell
For hope of heaven or fear of hell ;
And I lay listening in such pride !
And, soon as he had left my side,
Tripped to the church by morning-light
To save his soul in his despite.

X

I told the father all his schemes,
Who were his comrades, what their dreams
" And now make haste," I said, " to pray
" The one spot from his soul away ;
" To-night he comes, but not the same
" Will look ! " At night he never came.

XI

Nor next night : on the after-morn
I went forth with a strength new-born.
The church was empty ; something drew
My steps into the street ; I knew
It led me to the market-place :
Where, lo, on high, the father's face !

XII

That horrible black scaffold dressed,
That stapled block . . . God sink the rest !
That head strapped back, that blinding vest,
Those knotted hands and naked breast,
Till near one busy hangman pressed,
And, on the neck these arms caressed . . .

XIII

No part in aught they hope or fear !
No heaven with them, no hell !—and here,
No earth, not so much space as pens
My body in their worst of dens
But shall bear God and man my cry,
Lies—lies, again—and still, they lie !

CRISTINA

I

She should never have looked at me
If she meant I should not love her!
There are plenty . . . men, you call such,
I suppose . . . she may discover
All her soul to, if she pleases,
And yet leave much as she found them:
But I'm not so, and she knew it
When she fixed me, glancing round them.

II

What? To fix me thus meant nothing?
But I can't tell (there's my weakness)
What her look said!—no vile cant, sure,
About "need to strew the bleakness
"Of some lone shore with its pearl-seed.
"That the sea feels"—no "strange
yearning
"That such souls have, most to lavish
"Where there's chance of least returning."

III

Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows!
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure tho' seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments

Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

IV

There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honours perish,
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had play unstifled,
Seems the sole work of a life-time
That away the rest have trifled.

V

Doubt you if, in some such moment,
As she fixed me, she felt clearly,
Ages past the soul existed,
Here an age 'tis resting merely,
And hence fleets again for ages,
While the true end, sole and single,
It stops here for is, this love-way,
With some other soul to mingle ?

VI

Else it loses what it lived for,
And eternally must lose it ;
Better ends may be in prospect,
Deeper blisses (if you choose it),

But this life's end and this love-bliss
Have been lost here. Doubt you whether
This she felt as, looking at me,
Mine and her souls rushed together ?

VII

Oh, observe ! Of course, next moment,
The world's honours, in derision,
Trampled out the light for ever :
Never fear but there's provision
Of the devil's to quench knowledge
Lest we walk the earth in rapture !
—Making those who catch God's secret
Just so much more prize their capture !

VIII

Such am I : the secret's mine now !
She has lost me, I have gained her ;
Her soul's mine : and thus, grown perfect,
I shall pass my life's remainder.
Life will just hold out the proving
Both our powers, alone and blended :
And then, come next life quickly !
This world's use will have been ended.

THE LOST MISTRESS

I

All's over, then : does truth sound bitter
As one at first believes ?
Hark, 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves !

II

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
I noticed that, to-day ;
One day more bursts them open fully
—You know the red turns grey.

III

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest ?
May I take your hand in mine ?
Mere friends are we,—well, friends the merest
Keep much that I resign :

IV

For each glance of the eye so bright and black,
Though I keep with heart's endeavour,—
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Though it stay in my soul for ever !—

V

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger ;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer !

MEETING AT NIGHT

I

The grey sea and the long black land ;
And the yellow half-moon large and low ;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

II

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach ;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears ;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each !

PARTING AT MORNING

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim :
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

I

Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles,
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop—
Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

II

Now,—the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)
Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be
pressed,
Twelve abreast.

III

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was!
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'er-spreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone—
Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
Long ago;
Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
Struck them tame;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
Bought and sold.

IV

Now,—the single little turret that remains
On the plains,
By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
Overscored,
While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
Through the chinks—
Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
Sprang sublime,
And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced
As they raced,

And the monarch and his minions and his dames
Viewed the games.

V

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve
Smiles to leave
To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
In such peace,
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey
Melt away—
That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
Waits me there
In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
Till I come.

VI

But he looked upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
Colonnades,

All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then,
All the men!
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
Each on each.

VII

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—
Gold, of course.
Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

A LOVERS' QUARREL

I

Oh, what a dawn of day !
How the March sun feels like May !
All is blue again
After last night's rain,
And the South dries the hawthorn-spray.
Only, my Love's away !
I'd as lief that the blue were grey.

II

Runnels, which rillets swell,
Must be dancing down the dell,
With a foaming head
On the beryl bed
Paven smooth as a hermit's cell ;
Each with a tale to tell,
Could my Love but attend as well.

III

Dearest, three months ago !
When we lived blocked-up with snow,—
When the wind would edge
In and in his wedge,
In, as far as the point could go—
Not to our ingle, though,
Where we loved each the other so !

IV

Laughs with so little cause !
We devised games out of straws.
We would try and trace
One another's face
In the ash, as an artist draws ;
Free on each other's flaws,
How we chattered like two church daws !

V

What's in *The Times* ?—a scold
At the Emperor deep and cold ;
He has taken a bride
To his gruesome side,
That's as fair as himself is bold :
There they sit ermine-stoled,
And she powders her hair with gold.

VI

Fancy the Pampas' sheen !
Miles and miles of gold and green
Where the sunflowers blow
In a solid glow.
And—to break now and then the screen—
Black neck and eyeballs keen,
Up a wild horse leaps between !

VII

Try, will our table turn ?
Lay your hands there light, and yearn

Till the yearning slips
Thro' the finger-tips
In a fire which a few discern,
And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn!

VIII

Then we would up and pace,
For a change, about the place,
Each with arm o'er neck:
'Tis our quarter-deck,
We are seamen in woeful case.
Help in the ocean-space!
Or, if no help, we'll embrace.

IX

See, how she looks now, dressed
In a sledging-cap and vest!
'Tis a huge fur cloak—
Like a reindeer's yoke
Falls the lappet along the breast:
Sleeves for her arms to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

X

Teach me to flirt a fan
As the Spanish ladies can,
Or I tint your lip
With a burnt stick's tip

And you turn into such a man!
Just the two spots that span
Half the bill of the young male swan.

XI

Dearest, three months ago
When the mesmerizer Snow
With his hand's first sweep
Put the earth to sleep:
'Twas a time when the heart could show
All—how was earth to know,
'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro?

XII

Dearest, three months ago
When we loved each other so,
Lived and loved the same
Till an evening came
When a shaft from the devil's bow
Pierced to our ingle-glow,
And the friends were friend and foe!

XIII

Not from the heart beneath—
'Twas a bubble born of breath—
Neither sneer nor vaunt,
Nor reproach nor taunt.
See a word, how it severeth!
Oh, power of life and death
In the tongue, as the Preacher saith!

XIV

Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last
Me, your own, your You,—
Since, as truth is true,
I was You all the happy past—
Me do you leave aghast
With the memories We amassed ?

XV

Love, if you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
How I look to you
For the pure and true
And the beauteous and the right,—
Bear with a moment's spite
When a mere mote threats the white !

XVI

What of a hasty word ?
Is the fleshly heart not stirred
By a worm's pin-prick
Where its roots are quick ?
See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred—
Ear, when a straw is heard
Scratch the brain's coat of curd !

XVII

Foul be the world or fair
More or less, how can I care ?

'Tis the world the same
For my praise or blame,
And endurance is easy there.
Wrong in the one thing rare—
Oh, it is hard to bear!

XVIII

Here's the spring back or close,
When the almond-blossom blows:
We shall have the word
In a minor third
There is none but the cuckoo knows:
Heaps of the guelder-rose!
I must bear with it, I suppose.

XIX

Could but November come,
Were the noisy birds struck dumb
At the warning slash
Of his driver's-lash—
I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
Facing the castle glum
And the giant's fee-faw-fum!

XX

Then, were the world well stripped
Of the gear wherein equipped
We can stand apart,
Heart dispense with heart

In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,—
Oh, the world's hangings ripped,
We were both in a bare-walled crypt !

XXI

Each in the crypt would cry
" But one freezes here ! and why ?
" When a heart, as chill,
" At my own would thrill
" Back to life, and its fires out-fly ?
" Heart, shall we live or die ?
The rest, . . . settle by-and-by ! "

XXII

So, she's efface the score,
And forgive me as before.
It is twelve o'clock :
I shall hear her knock
In the worst of a storm's uproar,
I shall pull her through the door,
I shall have her for evermore !

BY THE FIRESIDE

I

How well I know what I mean to do
When the long dark autumn-evenings come :
And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue ?
With the music of all thy voices, dumb
In life's November too !

II

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,
O'er a great wise book as beseemeth age,
While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows
And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
Not verse now, only prose !

III

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,
" There he is at it, deep in Greek :
" Now then, or never, out we slip
" To cut from the hazels by the creek
" A mainmast for our ship ! "

IV

I shall be at it indeed, my friends :
Greek puts already on either side
Such a branch-work forth as soon extends
To a vista opening far and wide,
And I pass out where it ends.

V

The outside-frame, like your hazel-trees :
But the inside-archway widens fast,
And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
And we slope to Italy at last
And youth, by green degrees.

VI

I follow wherever I am led,
Knowing so well the leader's hand :
Oh woman-country, wooed not wed,
Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
Laid to their hearts instead !

VII

Look at the ruined chapel again
Half-way up in the Alpine gorge !
Is that a tower, I point you plain,
Or is it a mill, or an iron-forge
Breaks solitude in vain ?

VIII

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things ;
The woods are round us, heaped and dim ;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
The thread of water single and slim,
Through the ravage some torrent brings !

IX

Does it feed the little lake below ?
That speck of white just on its marge
Is Pella ; see, in the evening-glow,
How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
When Alp meets heaven in snow !

X

On our other side is the straight-up rock ;
And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
By boulder-stones where lichens mock
The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
Their teeth to the polished block.

XI

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
And thorny balls, each three in one,
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers !
For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun,
These early November hours.

XII

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss,
And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
Elf-needled mat of moss,

XIII

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
Last evening—nay, in to-day's first dew
Yon sudden coral nipple bulged,
Where a freaked fawn-coloured flaky crew
Of toadstools peep indulged.

XIV

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
That takes the turn to a range beyond,
Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge
Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
Danced over by the midge.

XV

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
Blackish-grey and mostly wet;
Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
See here again, how the lichens fret
And the roots of the ivy strike!

XVI

Poor little place, where its one priest comes
On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
Gathered within that precinct small
By the dozen ways one roams—

XVII

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,
Leave the grange where the woodman stores his
nuts,
Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread
Their gear on the rock's bare juts.

XVIII

It has some pretension too, this front,
With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise
Set over the porch, Art's early wont:
'Tis John in the Desert, I surmise,
But has borne the weather's brunt—

XIX

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
For a pent-house properly projects
Where three carved beams make a certain show
Dating—good thought of our architect's—
'Five, six, nine, he lets you know.

XX

And all day long a bird sings there,
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at
times;
The place is silent and aware;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.

XXI

My perfect wife, my Leonor,
Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for,
With whom beside should I dare pursue
The path grey heads abhor ?

XXII

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them ;
Youth, flowery all the way, there stops—
Not they ; age threatens and they contemn,
Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,
One inch from life's safe hem !

XXIII

With me, youth led . . . I will speak now,
No longer watch you as you sit
Reading by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it,
Mutely, my heart knows how—

XXIV

When, if I think but deep enough,
You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme ;
And you, too, find without rebuff
Response your soul seeks many a time
Piercing its fine flesh-stuff.

XXV

My own, confirm me! If I tread
This path back, is it not in pride
To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that, by its side,
Youth seems the waste instead?

XXVI

My own, see where the years conduct!
At first, 'twas something our two souls
Should mix as mists do; each is sucked
In each now: on, the new stream rolls,
Whatever rocks obstruct.

XXVII

Think, when our one soul understands
The great Word which makes all things new,
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,
How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?

XXVIII

Oh I must feel your brain prompt mine,
Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the divine!

XXIX

But who could have expected this
When we two drew together first
Just for the obvious human bliss,
To satisfy life's daily thirst
With a thing men seldom miss ?

XXXVI

We stoop and look in through the grate,
See the little porch and rustic door,
Read duly the dead builder's date ;
Then cross the bridge that we crossed before,
Take the path again—but wait !

XXXVII

Oh, moment, one and infinite !
The water slips o'er stock and stone ;
The West is tender, hardly bright :
How grey at once is the evening grown—
One star, its chrysolite !

XXXVIII

We two stood there with never a third,
But each by each, as each knew well :
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.

XXXIX

Oh, the little more, and how much it is !
And the little less, and what worlds away !
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this !

XL

Had she willed it, still has stood the screen
So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her :
I could fix her face with a guard between,
And find her soul as when friends confer,
Friends—lovers that might have been.

XLI

For my heart had a touch of the woodland time,
Wanting to sleep now over its best.
Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,
But bring to the last leaf no such test !
" Hold the last fast ! " runs the rhyme.

XLII

For a chance to make your little much,
To gain a lover and lose a friend,
Venture the tree and a myriad such,
When nothing you mar but the year can mend :
But a last lead—fear to touch !

XLIII

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
Eddying down till it find your face
At some slight wind—best chance of all!
Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
You trembled to forestall!

XLIV

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
That hair so dark and dear, how worth
That a man should strive and agonize,
And taste a veriest hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize!

XLV

You might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
His best of hope or his worst despair,
Yet end as he began.

XLVI

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
And filled my empty heart at a word.
If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
One near one is too far.

XLVII

A moment after, and hands unseen
Were hanging the night around us fast;
But we knew that a bar was broken between
Life and life; we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen.

XLVIII

The forests had done it; there they stood;
We caught for a moment the powers at play:
They had mingled us so, for once and good,
Their work was done—we might go or stay,
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

XLIX

How the world is made for each of us!
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's produce thus,
When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit, the thing it does!

L

Be hate that fruit or love that fruit,
It forwards the general deed of man,
And each of the Many helps to recruit
The life of the race by a general plan;
Each living his own, to boot.

LI

am named and known by that moment's feat ;
There took my station and degree ;
o grew my own small life complete,
As nature obtained her best of me—
)ne born to love you, sweet.

LII

nd to watch you sink by the fireside now
Back again, as you mutely sit
Iusing by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it,
'onder, my heart knows how !

LIII

o, earth has gained by one man the more,
And the gain of earth must be heaven's
gain too ;
nd the whole is well worth thinking o'er
Vhen autumn comes : which I mean to do
One day, as I said before.

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

I

I wonder do you feel to-day
As I have felt since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May ?

II

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalized me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

III

Help me to hold it ! First it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin : yonder weed
Took up the floating weft.

IV

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles—blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal : and last,
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast !

V

The champaign with its endless fleece
  Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
  An everlasting wash of air—
Rome's ghost since her decease.

VI

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
  Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
  Such letting nature have her way
While heaven looks from its towers!

VII

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
  Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
  How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

VIII

I would that you were all to me,
  You that are just so much, no more.
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
  Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?

IX

I would I could adopt your will,
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your soul's springs—your part my part
In life, for good and ill.

X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth—I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak—
Then the good minute goes.

XI

Already how am I so far
Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
Onward, whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?

XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!
Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern—
Infinite passion and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

RESPECTABILITY

I

Dear, had the world in its caprice
  Deigned to proclaim " I know you both,
  Have recognized your plighted troth,
Am sponsor for you : live in peace ! "—
How many precious months and years
  Of youth had passed, that speed so fast,
  Before we found it out at last,
The world, and what it fears ?

II

How much of priceless life were spent
  With men that every virtue decks,
  And women models of their sex,
Society's true ornament,—
Ere we dared wander, nights like this,
  Thro' wind and rain, and watch the Seine,
  And feel the Boulevart break again
To warmth and light and bliss ?

III

I know ! the world proscribes not love :
  Allows my fingers to caress
  Your lips' contour and downiness,
Provided it supply a glove.
The world's good word !—the Institute !
  Guizot receives Montalembert !
  Eh ? Down the court three lampions flare :
Put forward your best foot !

TIME'S REVENGE

I've a Friend, over the sea ;
I like him, but he loves me.
It all grew out of the books I write ;
They find such favour in his sight
That he slaughters you with savage looks
Because you don't admire my books.
He does himself though,—and if some vein
Were to snap to-night in this heavy brain,
To-morrow month, if I lived to try,
Round should I just turn quietly,
Or out of the bedclothes stretch my hand
Till I found him, come from his foreign land
To be my nurse in this poor place,
And make my broth and wash my face
And light my fire and, all the while,
Bear with his old good-humoured smile
That I told him " Better have kept away
" Than come and kill me, night and day,
" With, worse than fever throbs and shoots,
" The creaking of his clumsy boots."
I am as sure that this he would do,
As that Saint Paul's is striking two.
And I think I rather . . . woe is me !
—Yes, rather would see him than not see,
If lifting a hand could seat him there
Before me in the empty chair
To-night, when my head aches indeed,

And I can neither think nor read
Nor make these purple fingers hold
The pen; this garret's freezing cold!

And I've a Lady—there he wakes,
The laughing fiend and prince of snakes
Within me, at her name, to pray
Fate send some creature in the way
Of my love for her, to be down-torn,
Upthrust and outward-borne,
So I might prove myself that sea
Of passion which I needs must be!
Call my thoughts false and my fancies quaint
And my style infirm and its figures faint,
All the critics say, and more blame yet,
And not one angry word you get.
But, please you, wonder I would put
My cheek beneath that lady's foot
Rather than trample under mine
The laurels of the Florentine,
And you shall see how the devil spends
A fire God gave for other ends!
I tell you, I stride up and down
This garret, crowned with love's best crown,
And feasted with love's perfect feast,
To think I kill for her, at least,
Body and soul and peace and fame,
Alike youth's end and manhood's aim,
—So is my spirit, as flesh with sin,
Filled full, eaten out and in

With the face of her, the eyes of her,
The lips, the little chin, the stir
Of shadow round her mouth; and she
—I'll tell you,—calmly would decree
That I should roast at a slow fire,
If that would compass her desire
And make her one whom they invite
To the famous ball to-morrow night.

There may be heaven; there must be hell
Meantime, there is our earth here—well!

A LIGHT WOMAN

I

o far as our story approaches the end,
Which do you pity the most of us three ?—
Iy friend, or the mistress of my friend
With her wanton eyes, or me ?

II

Iy friend was already too good to lose,
And seemed in the way of improvement yet,
Vhen she crossed his path with her hunting-noose
And over him drew her net.

III

Vhen I saw him tangled in her toils,
A shame, said I, if she adds just him
'o her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
The hundredth for a whim !

IV

And before my friend be wholly hers,
How easy to prove to him, I said,
An eagle's the game her pride prefers,
Though she snaps at a wren instead !

V

So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
My hand sought hers as in earnest need,
And round she turned for my noble sake,
And gave me herself indeed.

VI

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world
The wren is he, with his maiden face.
—You look away and your lip is curled ?
Patience, a moment's space !

VII

For see, my friend goes shaking and white
He eyes me as the basilisk :
I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
Eclipsing his sun's disk.

VIII

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief :
"Though I love her—that, he compre
hends—
"One should master one's passions, (love, i
chief)
"And be loyal to one's friends ! "

IX

And she,—she lies in my hand as tame
As a pear late basking over a wall ;
Just a touch to try and off it came ;
('Tis mine,—can I let it fall ?)

X

'ith no mind to eat it, that's the worst !
Were it thrown in the road, would the case
assist ?
'was quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst
When I gave its stalk a twist.

XI

nd I,—what I seem to my friend, you see :
What I soon shall seem to his love, you
guess :
'hat I seem to myself, do you ask of me ?
No hero, I confess.

XII

'is an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own :
'et think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone !

XIII

)ne likes to show the truth for the truth ;
That the woman was light is very true :
3ut suppose she says,—Never mind that youth !
What wrong have I done to you ?

XIV

Vell, anyhow, here the story stays,
So far at least as I understand ;
\nd, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
Here's a subject made to your hand !

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

I

I said—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
  Since this was written and needs must be—
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
Only a memory of the same,
  —And this beside, if you will not blame,
  Your leave for one more last ride with me

II

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two
  With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.
  Who knows but the world may end to
    night?

III

lush ! if you saw some western cloud
ll billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
y many benedictions—sun's
nd moon's and evening star's at once—
And so, you, looking and loving best,
onscious grew, your passions drew
loud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
own on you, near and yet more near,
ill flesh must fade for heaven was here !—
hus leant she and lingered —joy and fear !
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV

hen we began to ride. My soul
moothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
reshening and fluttering in the wind.
ast hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry ?
Iad I said that, had I done this,
o might I gain, so might I miss.
ight she have loved me ? Just as well
he might have hated, who can tell !
Vhere had I been now if the worst befell ?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V

ail I alone, in words and deeds ?
Vhy, all men strive and who succeeds ?
Ve rode ; it seemed my spirit flew,

Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,—All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride

VI

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! What atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

VII

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?

re you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
earer one whit your own sublime
han we who never have turned a rhyme ?
Sing, riding's a joy ! For me, I ride.

VIII

nd you, great sculptor—so, you gave
score of years to Art, her slave,
nd that's your Venus, whence we turn
o yonder girl that fords the burn !
You acquiesce, and shall I repine ?
Vhat, man of music, you grown grey
Vith notes and nothing else to say,
this your sole praise from a friend,
Greatly his opera's strains intend,
Put in music we know how fashions end ! "
I gave my youth ; but we ride, in fine.

IX

Vho knows what's fit for us ? Had fate
roposed bliss here should sublimate
y being—had I signed the bond—
ill one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
his foot once planted on the goal,
his glory-garland round my soul,
ould I descry such ? Try and test !
sink back shuddering from the quest.
arth being so good, would heaven seem best ?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X

And yet—she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,—
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me—she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever.

But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good; I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!

Porphyria's love; she guessed not how
  Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
  And all night long we have not stirred,
  And yet God has not said a word!

CONFESSIONS

I

What is he buzzing in my ears ?
"Now that I come to die,
"Do I view the world as a vale of tears ?"
Ah, reverend sir, not I !

II

What I viewed there once, what I view again
Where the physic bottles stand
On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,
With a wall to my bedside hand.

III

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,
From a house you could descry
O'er the garden-wall : is the curtain blue
Or green to a healthy eye ?

IV

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
Blue above lane and wall ;
And that farthest bottle labelled "Ether"
Is the house o'ertopping all.

V

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,
There watched for me, one June,
A girl: I know, sir, it's improper,
My poor mind's out of tune.

VI

Only, there was a way . . . you crept
Close by the side, to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
They styled their house "The Lodge."

VII

What right had a lounger up their lane?
But, by creeping very close,
With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain
And stretch themselves to Oes.

VIII

Yet never catch her and me together,
As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether,"
And stole from stair to stair.

IX

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
We loved, sir—used to meet:
How sad and bad and mad it was—
But then, how it was sweet!

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION

There's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof;
No suns and moons though e'er so bright
Avail to stop me: splendour-proof
I keep the broods of stars aloof:
For I intend to get to God,
For 'tis to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
Those shoals of dazzling glory, passed,
I lay my spirit down at last.
I lie where I have always lain,
God smiles as he has always smiled;
Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
Ere stars were thundergrit, or piled
The heavens, God thought on me his child
Ordained a life for me, arrayed
Its circumstances every one
To the minutest; ay, God said
This head this hand should rest upon
Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun.
And having thus created me,
Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,
Guiltless for ever, like a tree
That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know
The law by which it prospers so:
But sure that thought and word and deed
All go to swell his love for me,

Me, made because that love had need
Of something irreversibly
Pledged solely its content to be.
Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,
No poison-gourd foredoomed to stoop!
I have God's warrant, could I blend
All hideous sins, as in a cup,
To drink the mingled venoms up;
Secure my nature will convert
The draught to blossoming gladness fast:
While sweet dews turn to the gourd's hurt,
And bloat, and while they bloat it, blast,
As from the first its lot was cast.
For as I lie, smiled on, full-fed
By unexhausted power to bless,
I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,
And those its waves of flame oppress,
Swarming in ghastly wretchedness;
Whose life on earth aspired to be
One altar-smoke, so pure!—to win
If not love like God's love for me,
At least to keep his anger in;
And all their striving turned to sin.
Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white
With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,
The martyr, the wan acolyte,
The incense-swinging child,—undone
Before God fashioned star or sun!

God, whom I praise ; how could I praise,
If such as I might understand,
Make out and reckon on his ways,
And bargain for his love, and stand,
Paying a price, at his right hand ?

SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER

I

-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flower-pots, do!
hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you!
hat? Your myrtle-bush wants trimming?
Oh, that rose has prior claims—
eeds its leaden vase filled brimming?
Hell dry you up with its flames!

II

: the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear
ise talk of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year:
ot a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
hat's the Latin name for "parsley"?
What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

III

hew! We'll have our platter burnished,
Laid with care on our own shelf!
ith a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
And a goblet for ourself,
insed like something sacrificial
Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps—
arked with L for our initial!
(He-he! There his lily snaps!)

IV

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
—Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
(That is, if he'd let it show!)

V

When he finishes refection,
Knife and fork he never lays
Cross-wise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jesu's praise.
I the Trinity illustrate,
Drinking watered orange-pulp—
In three sips the Arian frustrate;
While he drains his at one gulp.

VI

Oh, those melons? If he's able
We're to have a feast! So nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
All of us get each a slice.
How go on your flowers? None double
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange!—And I, too, at such trouble,
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

VII

ere's a great text in Galatians,
Once you trip on it, entails
renty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails :
I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
in him round and send him flying
Off to hell, a Manichee ?

VIII

, my scrofulous French novel
On grey paper with blunt type !
mply glance at it, you grovel
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe :
I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
hen he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in't ?

IX

, there's Satan !—one might venture
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
ich a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
lasted lay that rose-acacia
We're so proud of ! *Hy, Zy, Hine* . . .
t, there's Vespers ! *Plena gratia*
Ave, Virgo ! Gr-r-r—you swine !

A TOCCATA* OF GALUPPI'S

[Galuppi was a famous Italian composer of th
eighteenth century.]

I

Oh, Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad t
find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prov
me deaf and blind;
But although I take your meaning, 'tis wit
such a heavy mind!

II

Here you come with your old music, and here
all the good it brings.
What, they lived once thus at Venice whe
the merchants were the kings,
Where Saint Mark's is, where the Doges us
to wed the sea with rings?

III

Ay, because the sea's the street there; an
'tis arched by . . . what you call
. . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, whe
they kept the carnival:
I was never out of England—it's as if I sa
it all.

* An overture.

IV

id young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm in May ?
alls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,
Vhen they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you say ?

V

Vas a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,—
n her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,
'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head ?

VI

Vell, and it was graceful of them—they'd break talk off and afford
–She, to bite her mask's black velvet—he, to finger on his sword,
Vhile you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord ?

VII

Vhat ? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,
'old them something ? Those suspensions, those solutions—" Must we die ? "
'hose commiserating sevenths—" Life might last ! We can but try ! "

VIII

"Were you happy?"—"Yes."—"And are
you still as happy?"—"Yes. And you?"
—"Then, more kisses!"—"Did *I* stop them
when a million seemed so few?"
Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must
be answered to!

IX

So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they
praised you, I dare say!
"Brave Galuppi! That was music! good
alike at grave and gay!
"I can always leave off talking when I hear a
master play!"

X

Then they left you for their pleasure: till in
due time, one by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some
with deeds as well undone,
Death stepped tacitly and took them where
they never see the sun.

XI

But when I sit down to reason, think to take
my stand nor swerve,
While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from
nature's close reserve,
In you come with your cold music till I creep
thro' every nerve.

XII

es, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where
a house was burned :
Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice
spent what Venice earned.
The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a
soul can be discerned.

XIII

Yours for instance : you know physics,
something of geology,
Mathematics are your pastime ; souls shall
rise in their degree ;
Butterflies may dread extinction—you'll not
die, it cannot be !

XIV

As for Venice and her people, merely born
to bloom and drop,
Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth
and folly were the crop :
What of soul was left, I wonder, when the
kissing had to stop ?

XV

Dust and ashes ! " So you creak it, and I
want the heart to scold.
ar dead women, with such hair, too—what's
become of all the gold
ed to hang and brush their bosoms ? I feel
chilly and grown old.

NED BRATTS

[See John Bunyan's *Life and Death of Mr Badman.*]

'Twas Bedford Special Assizes, one daft Mid
summer's Day:
A broiling blasting June,—was never its like
men say.
Corn stood sheaf-ripe already, and trees looke
yellow as that;
Ponds drained dust-dry, the cattle lay foamin
around each flat.
Inside town, dogs went mad, but folk kep
bibbing beer
While the parsons prayed for rain. 'Twa
horrible, yes—but queer:
Queer—for the sun laughed gay, yet nobod
moved a hand
To work one stroke at his trade: as given t
understand
That all was come to a stop, work and suc
worldly ways,
And the world's old self about to end in
merry blaze.
Midsummer's Day moreover was the first
Bedford Fair,
With Bedford Town's tag-rag and bobta
a-bowsing there.

t the Court House, Quality crammed :
through doors ope, windows wide,
gh on the Bench you saw sit Lordships side
by side.
ere frowned Chief Justice Jukes, fumed
learned Brother Small,
d fretted their fellow Judge : like threshers,
one and all,
a reek while laying down the law in a furnace.
Why ?
cause their lungs breathed flame—the regu-
lar crowd forbye—
om gentry pouring in—quite a nosegay, to
be sure !
w else could they pass the time, six mortal
hours endure
l night should extinguish day, when matters
might haply mend ?
anwhile no bad resource was—watching
begin and end
me trial for life and death, in a brisk five
minutes' space,
d betting which knave would 'scape, which
hang, from his sort of face.

their Lordships toiled and moiled, and a
deal of work was done
warrant) to justify the mirth of the crazy sun
this and t'other lout, struck dumb at the
sudden show

Of red robes and white wigs, boggled no
answered "Boh!"
When asked why he, Tom Styles, should no
—because Jack Nokes
Had stolen the horse—be hanged: for Judge
must have their jokes,
And louts must make allowance—let's say, fo
some blue fly
Which punctured a dewy scalp where th
frizzles stuck awry—
Else Tom had fleered scot-free, so nearly ove
and done
Was the main of the job. Full-measure, th
gentles enjoyed their fun,
As a twenty-five were tried, rank Puritan
caught at prayer
In a cow-house and laid by the heels,—have a
'em, devil may care!—
And ten were prescribed the whip, and ten
brand on the cheek,
And five a slit of the nose—just leaving enoug
to tweak.

Well, things at jolly high-tide, amusemen
steeped in fire,
While noon smote fierce the roof's red tiles t
heart's desire,
The Court a-simmer with smoke, one fermen
of oozy flesh,
One spirituous humming musk mount-mount
ing until its mesh

toiled all heads in a fluster, and Serjeant
Postlethwayte
Dashing the wig oblique as he mopped his
oily pate—
ied " Silence, or I grow grease ! No loophole
lets in air ?
rymen,—Guilty, Death ! Gainsay me if you
dare ! "
Things at this pitch, I say,—what hubbub
without the doors ?
hat laughs, shrieks, hoots and yells, what
rudest of uproars ?

ounce through the barrier throng a bulk
comes rolling vast !
umps, kicks,—no manner of use !—spite of
them rolls at last
to the midst a ball which, bursting, brings to
view
iblican Black Ned Bratts and Tabby his big
wife too :
th in a muck-sweat, both . . . were never
such eyes uplift
the sight of yawning hell, such nostrils—
snouts that sniffed
lphur, such mouths a-gape ready to swallow
flame !
rrified, hideous, frank fiend-faces ! yet, all
the same,
xed with a certain . . . eh ? how shall I
dare style—mirth

The desperate grin of the guess that, coul
they break from earth,
Heaven was above, and hell might rage
impotence
Below the saved, the saved!

"Confound you! (no offence
Out of our way,—push, wife! Yonder the
Worships be!"
Ned Bratts has reached the bar, and "He
my Lords," roars he,
"A Jury of life and death, Judges the prin
of the land,
Constables, javelineers,—all met, if I unde
stand,
To decide so knotty a point as whether 'tw
Jack or Joan
Robbed the henroost, pinched the pig, hit t
King's Arms with a stone,
Dropped the baby down the well, left t
tithesman in the lurch,
Or, three whole Sundays running, not on
attended church!
What a pother—do these deserve the paris
stocks or whip,
More or less brow to brand, much or little nc
to snip,—
When, in our Public, plain stand we—tha
we stand here,
I and my Tab, brass-bold, brick-built of be
and beer,

—Do not we, slut ? Step forth and show your
beauty, jade !
Wife of my bosom—that's the word now !
What a trade
We drove ! None said us nay : nobody loved
his life
So little as wag a tongue against us,—did
they, wife ?
Yet they knew us all the while, in their hearts,
for what we are
—Worst couple, rogue and quean, unhanged—
search near and far !
Eh, Tab ! The pedlar, now—o'er his noggin
—who warned a mate
To cut and run, nor risk his pack where its
loss of weight
Was the least to dread,—aha, how we two
laughed a-good
As, stealing round the midden, he came on
where I stood
With billet poised and raised,—you, ready
with the rope,—
Ah, but that's past, that's sin repented of, we
hope !
Men knew us for that same, yet safe and
sound stood we !
The lily-livered knaves knew too (I've baulked
a d——)
Our keeping the ' Pied Bull ' was just a mere
pretence :

Too slow the pounds make food, drink, lodging
from out the pence!
There's not a stoppage to travel has chanced
this ten long year,
No break into hall or grange, no lifting of na
or steer,
Not a single roguery, from the clipping of
purse
To the cutting of a throat, but paid us tol
Od's curse!
When Gipsy Smouch made bold to cheat us c
our due,
—Eh, Tab? The Squire's strong-box w
helped the rascal to—
I think he pulled a face, next Sessions' swinging
time!
He danced the jig that needs no floor,—and
here's the prime,
'Twas Scroggs that houghed the mare! Ay
those were busy days!
Well, there we flourished brave, like scripture
trees called bays,
Faring high, drinking hard, in money up t
head
—Not to say, boots and shoes, when . .
Zounds, I nearly said—
Lord, to unlearn one's language! How sha
we labour, wife?
Have you, fast hold, the Book? Grasp, gri
it, for your life!

ee, sirs, here's life, salvation ! Here's—hold
but out my breath—
Then did I speak so long without once swear-
ing ? 'Sdeath,
o, nor unhelped by ale since man and boy !
And yet
ll yesterday I had to keep my whistle wet
While reading Tab this Book : book ? Don't
say ' book '—they're plays,
ngs, ballads and the like : here's no such
strawy blaze,
ut sky wide ope, sun, moon, and seven stars
out full-flare !
ab, help and tell ! I'm hoarse. A mug !
or—no, a prayer !
ip for one out of the Book ! Who wrote it
in the Jail
-He plied his pen unhelped by beer, sirs,
I'll be bail !

I've got my second wind. In trundles she
—that's Tab.
Why, Grammer, what's come now, that—
bobbing like a crab
n Yule-tide bowl—your head's a-work and
both your eyes
reak loose ? Afeard, you fool ? As if the
dead can rise !
ay—Bagman Dick was found last May with
fuddling-cap

Stuffed in his mouth: to choke's a natura
mishap!'
'Gaffer, be—blessed,' cries she, 'and Bagma
Dick as well!
I, you, and he are damned: this Public is ou
hell:
We live in fire: live coals don't feel!—onc
quenched, they learn—
Cinders do, to what dust they moulder whil
they burn!'
"'If you don't speak straight out,' says I—
belike I swore—
'A knobstick, well you know the taste of
shall, once more,
Teach you to talk, my maid!' She ups wit
such a face,
Heart sunk inside me. 'Well, pad on, m
prate-apace!

"'I've been about those laces we need fo
. . . never mind!
If henceforth they tie hands, 'tis mine they'
have to bind.
You know who makes them best—the Tinke
in our cage,
Pulled-up for gospelling, twelve years ago
no age
To try another trade,—yet, so he scorned to tak
Money he did not earn, he taught himself th
make

Of laces, tagged and tough—Dick Bagman
found them so!
Good customers were we! Well, last week,
you must know
His girl,—the blind young chit, who hawks
about his wares,—
She takes it in her hand to come no more—
such airs
These hussies have! Yet, since we need a
stoutish lace,—
"I'll to the jail-bird father, abuse her to his
face!"
So, first I filled a jug to give me heart, and then,
Primed to the proper pitch, I posted to their
den—
Patmore—they style their prison! I tip the
turnkey, catch
My heart up, fix my face, and fearless lift the
latch—
Both arms a-kimbo, in bounce with a good
round oath
Ready for rapping out: no "Lawks" nor
"By my troth!"

"'There sat my man, the father. He looked
up: what one feels
When heart that leapt to mouth drops down
again to heels!
He raised his hand . . . Hast seen, when
drinking out the night,

And in, the day, earth grow another something quite
Under the sun's first stare? I stood a very stone.
" ' " Woman!" (a fiery tear he put in every tone),
" How should my child frequent your house where lust is sport,
Violence—trade? Too true! I trust no vague report.
Her angel's hand, which stops the sight of sin, leaves clear
The other gate of sense, lets outrage through the ear.
What has she heard!—which, heard shall never be again.
Better lack food than feast, a Dives in the—wain
Or reign or train—of Charles!" (His language was not ours:
'Tis my belief, God spoke: no tinker has such powers.)
" Bread, only bread they bring—my laces: if we broke
Your lump of leavened sin, the loaf's first crumb would choke!"
" ' Down on my marrow-bones! Then all at once rose he:
His brown hair burst a-spread, his eyes were suns to see:

Up went his hands: "Through flesh, I reach,
I read thy soul!
So may some stricken tree look blasted, bough
and bole,
Champed by the fire-tooth, charred without,
and yet, thrice-bound
With dreriment about, within may life be
found,
A prisoned power to branch and blossom as
before,
Could but the gardener cleave the cloister,
reach the core,
Loosen the vital sap: yet where shall help
be found?
Who says 'How save it?'—nor 'Why cumbers
it the ground?'
Woman, that tree art thou! All sloughed
about with scurf,
Thy stag-horns fright the sky, thy snake-roots
sting the turf!
Drunkenness, wantonness, theft, murder gnash
and gnarl
Thine outward, case thy soul with coating like
the marle
Satan stamps flat upon each head beneath his
hoof!
And how deliver such? The strong men keep
aloof,
Lover and friend stand far, the mocking ones
pass by,

Tophet gapes wide for prey : lost soul, despair
and die !
What then ? ' Look unto me and be ye
saved ! ' saith God :
' I strike the rock, outstreats the life-stream
at my rod !
Be your sins scarlet, wool shall they seem like,
—although
As crimson red, yet turn white as the driven
snow ! ' "

" ' There, there, there ! All I seem to somehow
understand
Is—that, if I reached home, 'twas through the
guiding hand
Of his blind girl which led and led me through
the streets
And out of town and up to door again. What
greets
First thing my eye, as limbs recover from their
swoon ?
A book—this Book she gave at parting.
" Father's boon—
The Book he wrote : it reads as if he spoke
himself :
He cannot preach in bonds, so,—take it down
from shelf
When you want counsel,—think you hear his
very voice ! "

'Wicked dear Husband, first despair and
then rejoice!'
ear wicked Husband, waste no tick of moment
more.
e saved like me, bald trunk! There's green-
ness yet at core,
ap under slough! Read, read!'

"Let me take breath, my lords!
'd like to know, are these—hers, mine, or
Bunyan's words?
'm 'wildered—scarce with drink,—nowise with
drink alone!
'ou'll say, with heat: but heat's no stuff to
split a stone
ike this black boulder—this flint heart of
mine: the Book—
'hat dealt the crashing blow! Sirs, here's the
fist that shook
Iis beard till Wrestler Jem howled like a just-
lugged bear!
'ou had brained me with a feather: at once
I grew aware
'hristmas was meant for me. A burden at
your back,
Good Master Christmas? Nay,—yours was
that Joesph's sack,
—Or whose it was,—which held the cup,—
compared with mine!
Robbery loads my loins, perjury cracks my chine,

Adultery . . . nay, Tab, you pitched me as
I flung !
One word, I'll up with fist . . . No, sweet
spouse, hold your tongue !

" I'm hasting to the end. The Book, sirs—
take and read !
You have my history in a nutshell,—ay,
indeed !
It must off, my burden ! See, slack straps and
into pit,
Roll, reach the bottom, rest, rot there—a
plague on it !
For a mountain's sure to fall and bury Bedford
Town,
' Destruction '—that's the name, and fire shall
burn it down !
O 'scape the wrath in time ! Time's now, if
not too late.
How can I pilgrimage up to the wicket-gate ?
Next comes Despond the slough : not that I
fear to pull
Through mud, and dry my cloths at brave
House Beautiful—
But it's late in the day, I reckon : had I left
years ago
Town, wife, and children dear . . . Well,
Christmas did, you know !—
Soon I had met in the valley and tried my
cudgel's strength

)n the enemy horned and winged, a-straddle
across its length !
Iave at his horns, thwack : they snap, see !
Hoof and hoof—
Sang, break the fetlock-bones ! For love's
sake, keep aloof
ngels ! I'm man and match,—this cudgel
for my flail,—
'o thresh him, hoofs and horns, bat's wing
and serpent's tail !
chance gone by ! But then, what else does
Hopeful ding
nto the deafest ear except—hope, hope's the
thing ?
oo late i' the day for me to thrid the windings :
but
here's still a way to win the race by death's
short cut !
id Master Faithful need climb the Delightful
Mounts ?
'o, straight to Vanity Fair,—a fair, by all
accounts,
uch as is held outside,—lords, ladies, grand
and gay,—
ays he in the face of them, just what you
hear me say.
nd the Judges brought him in guilty and
brought him out
o die in the market-place—St. Peter's Green's
about

The same thing: there they flogged, flayed
buffeted, lanced with knives,
Pricked him with swords,—I'll swear, he'd ful
a cat's nine lives,—
So to his end at last came Faithful,—ha, ha, he
Who holds the highest card? for there stand
hid, you see,
Behind the rabble-rout, a chariot, pair and all
He's in, he's off, he's up, through clouds, a
trumpet-call,
Carried the nearest way to Heaven-gate
Odds my life—
Has nobody a sword to spare? not even
knife?
Then hang me, draw and quarter! Tab—d
the same by her!
O Master Worldly-Wiseman . . . that's Maste
Interpreter,
Take the will, not the deed! Our gibbet'
handy close:
Forestall Last Judgement-Day! Be kindly
not morose!
There wants no earthly judge-and-jurying
here we stand—
Sentence our guilty selves: so, hang us out o
hand!
Make haste for pity's sake! A single moment'
loss
Means—Satan's lord once more: his whispe
shoots across

All singing in my heart, all praying in my brain,
It comes of heat and beer ! '—hark how he guffaws plain !
To-morrow you'll wake bright, and, in a safe skin, hug
Your sound selves, Tab and you, over a foaming jug !
You've had such qualms before, time out of mind ! ' He's right !
Did not we kick and cuff and curse away, that night
When home we blindly reeled, and left poor humpback Joe
To the lurch to pay for what . . . somebody did, you know !
Both of us maundered then ' Lame humpback, —never more
Will he come limping, drain his tankard at our door !
He'll swing, while—somebody . . . ' Says Tab, ' No, for I'll peach ! '
I'm for you, Tab,' cries I, ' there's rope enough for each ! '
So blubbered we, and bussed, and went to bed upon
The grace of Tab's good thoughts : by morning, all was gone !
We laughed—' What's life to him, a cripple of no account ? '

Oh, waves increase around—I feel them moun
and mount !
Hang us ! To-morrow brings Tom Bearwar
with his bears :
One new black-muzzled brute beats Sackerson
he swears :
(Sackerson, for my money !) And, baitin
o'er, the Brawl
They lead on Turner's Patch,—lads, lasses u
tails all,—
I'm i' the thick o' the throng ! That mean
the Iron Cage,
—Means the Lost Man inside ! Where's hop
for such as wage
War against light ? Light's left, light's here
I hold light still,
So does Tab—make but haste to hang us both
You will ? "

I promise, when he stopped you might hav
heard a mouse
Squeak, such a death-like hush sealed up th
old Mote House.
But when the mass of man sank meek upo
his knees,
While Tab, alongside, wheezed a hoarse " D
hang us, please ! "
Why, then the waters rose, no eye but ran wit
tears,
Hearts heaved, heads thumped, until, payi
all past arrears

Of pity and sorrow, at last a regular scream outbroke
Of triumph, joy and praise.

My Lord Chief Justice spoke,
First mopping brow and cheek, where still, for one that budged,
Another bead broke fresh: "What Judge, that ever judged
Since first the world began, judged such a case as this?
Why, Master Bratts, long since, folk smelt you out, I wis!
I had my doubts, i' faith, each time you played the fox
Convicting geese of crime in yonder witness-box—
Yea, much did I misdoubt, the thief that stole her eggs
Was hardly goosey's self at Reynard's game, i' feggs!
Yet thus much was to praise—you spoke to point, direct—
Swore you heard, saw the theft: no jury could suspect—
Dared to suspect,—I'll say,—a spot in white so clear:
Goosey was throttled, true: but thereof godly fear
Came of example set, much as our laws intend;

And, though a fox confessed, you proved the
Judge's friend.
What if I had my doubts ? Suppose I gave
them breath,
Brought you to bar : what work to do, ere
'Guilty, Death,'
Had paid our pains ! What heaps of witnesses
to drag
From holes and corners, paid from out the
County's bag !
Trial three dog-days long ! *Amicus Curiæ*—that's
Your title, no dispute—truth-telling Master
Bratts !
Thank you, too, Mistress Tab ! Why doubt
one word you say ?
Hanging you both deserve, hanged both shall
be this day !
The tinker needs must be a proper man. I've
heard
He lies in Jail long since : if Quality's good word
Warrants me letting loose,—some householder,
I mean—
Freeholder, better still,—I don't say but—
between
Now and next Sessions. . . . Well ! Consider
of his case,
I promise to, at least : we owe him so much
grace,
Not that—no, God forbid !—I lean to think,
as you,

he grace that such repent is any jail-bird's due:
rather see the fruit of twelve years' pious reign—
stræa Redux, Charles restored his rights again!
–Of which, another time! I somehow feel a peace
tealing across the world. May deeds like this increase!
o, Master Sheriff, stay that sentence I pronounced
On those two dozen odd: deserving to be trounced
oundly, and yet . . . well, well, at all events despatch
This pair of—shall I say, sinner-saints?—ere we catch
Their jail-distemper too. Stop tears, or I'll indite
All weeping Bedfordshire for turning Bunyanite!"

So, forms were galloped through. If Justice, on the spur,
Proved somewhat expeditious, would Quality demur?
And happily hanged were they,—why lengthen out my tale?—
Where Bunyan's Statue stands facing where stood his Jail.

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
Each in its tether
Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
Care-for till cock-crow :
Look out if yonder be not day again
Rimming the rock-row !
That's the appropriate country ; there, man's thought,
Rarer, intenser,
Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
Chafes in the censer.
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop ;
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
Crowded with culture !
All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels ;
Clouds overcome it ;
No ! yonder sparkle is the citadel's
Circling its summit.
Thither our path lies ; wind we up the heights :
Wait ye the warning ?
Our low life was the level's and the night's ;
He's for the morning.

tep to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
'Ware the beholders !
'his is our master, famous calm and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.

* * * * *

Here's the town-gate reached : there's the market-place
Gaping before us.)
Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus !)
That before living he'd learn how to live—
No end to learning :
Learn the means first—God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.
Others mistrust and say, " But time escapes :
" Live now or never ! "
He said, " What's time ? Leave Now for dogs and apes !
" Man has Forever."
Back to his book then : deeper drooped his head :
Calculus racked him :
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead :
Tussis attacked him.
" Now, master, take a little rest ! "—not he !
(Caution redoubled,
tep two abreast, the way winds narrowly !)
Not a whit troubled
Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon

He (soul-hydroptic with a scared thirst)
Sucked at the flagon.
Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
Bad is our bargain!
Was it not great? did not he throw on God,
(He loves the burthen)—
God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?
Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
Just what it all meant?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by instalment.
He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success
Found, or earth's failure:
"Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes:
"Hence with life's pale lure!"
That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That, has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!

is, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.
, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar ;
ill, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife :
While he could stammer
e settled *Hoti's* business—let it be !—
Properly based *Oun*—
ave us the doctrines of the enclitic *De*.
Dead from the waist down.
ell, here's the platform, here's the proper place :
Hail to your purlieus,
ll ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews !
ere's the top-peak ; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there :
his man decided not to Live but Know—
Bury this man there ?
ere—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
ars come and go ! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send !
ofty designs must close in like effects :
Loftily lying,
eave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.

GARDEN FANCIES

II. Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis

Plague take all your pedants, say I!
He who wrote what I hold in my hand
Centuries back was so good as to die,
Leaving this rubbish to cumber the land;
This, that was a book in its time,
Printed on paper and bound in leather,
Last month in the white of a matin-prime
Just when the birds sang all together.

II

Into the garden I brought it to read,
And under the arbute and laurustine
Read it, so help me grace in my need,
From title-page to closing line.
Chapter on chapter did I count,
As a curious traveller counts Stonehenge;
Added up the mortal amount;
And then proceeded to my revenge.

III

Yonder's a plum-tree with a crevice
An owl would build in, were he but sage;
For a lap of moss, like a fine pont-levis
In a castle of the Middle Age,

Joins to a lip of gum, pure amber ;
  When he'd be private, there might he spend
Hours alone in his lady's chamber :
  Into this crevice I dropped our friend.

IV

Splash, went he, as under he ducked,
  —At the bottom, I knew, rain-drippings stagnate :
Next, a handful of blossoms I plucked
  To bury him with, my bookshelf's magnate ;
Then I went in-doors, brought out a loaf,
  Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis ;
Lay on the grass and forgot the oaf
  Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais.

V

Now, this morning, betwixt the moss
  And gum that locked our friend in limbo,
A spider had spun his web across,
  And sat in the midst with arms akimbo :
So, I took pity, for learning's sake,
  And, *de profundis, accentibus lætis,*
Cantate ! quoth I, as I got a rake ;
  And up I fished his delectable treatise.

VI

Here you have it, dry in the sun,
  With all the binding all of a blister,

And great blue spots where the ink has run
And reddish streaks that wink and gliste
O'er the page so beautifully yellow :
Oh, well have the droppings played thei
tricks !
Did he guess how toadstools grow, thi
fellow ?
Here's one stuck in his chapter six !

VII

How did he like it when the live creatures
Tickled and toused and browsed him al
over
And worm, slug, eft, with serious features,
Came in, each one, for his right of trover
—When the water-beetle with great blin
deaf face
Made of her eggs the stately deposit,
And the newt borrowed just so much of th
preface
As tiled in the top of his black wife'
closet ?

VIII

All that life and fun and romping,
All that frisking and twisting an
coupling,
While slowly our poor friend's leaves wer
swamping
And clasps were cracking and cover
suppling !

As if you had carried sour John Knox
To the play-house at Paris, Vienna or Munich.
Fastened him into a front-row box,
And danced off the ballet with trousers and tunic.

IX

Come, old martyr! What, torment enough is it?
Back to my room shall you take your sweet self.
Good-bye, mother-beetle; husband-eft, *sufficit!*
See the snug niche I have made on my shelf!
A.'s book shall prop you up, B.'s shall cover you,
Here's C. to be grave with, or D. to be gay,
And with E. on each side, and F. right over you,
Dry-rot at ease till the Judgment-Day!

MY LAST DUCHESS

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's
hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
"Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
"Must never hope to reproduce the faint
"Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such
stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made
glad,

oo easily impressed ; she liked whate'er
he looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
ir, 'twas all one ! My favour at her breast,
he dropping of the daylight in the West,
he bough of cherries some officious fool
roke in the orchard for her, the white mule
he rode with round the terrace—all and each
Vould draw from her alike the approving
speech,
r blush, at least. She thanked men—good !
but thanked
omehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
Iy gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
Vith anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
his sort of trifling ? Even had you skill
n speech (which I have not) to make your will
uite clear to such an one, and say, " Just this
Or that in you disgusts me ; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark "—and if she let
Ierself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
er wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
-E'en then would be some stooping ; and I
choose
ever to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Vhene'er I passed her ; but who passed
without
uch the same smile ? This grew ; I gave
commands ;
hen all smiles stopped together. There she
stands

As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

HERVÉ RIEL*

(Mr. Browning sent the hundred guineas he received for
is poem to the relief of the starving French after the
ge of Paris. The story the poem records is true.)

I

n the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred
ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French—woe to
France!
nd, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter
through the blue
ike a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal
of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on
the Rance,
'ith the English fleet in view.

II

'was the squadron that escaped, with the
victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great
ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
nd they signalled to the place
Help the winners of a race!

* First published (*Cornhill Magazine*), in 1871.

Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us
quick—or, quicker still,
Here's the English can and will ! "

III

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and
leapt on board ;
" Why, what hope or chance have ships like
these to pass ? " laughed they :
" Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the
passage scarred and scored—
Shall the ' Formidable ' here, with her twelve
and eighty guns,
Think to make the river-mouth by the single
narrow way,
Trust to enter—where 'tis ticklish for a craft
of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside ?
Now, 'tis slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring ? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay ! "

IV

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate :
" Here's the English at our heels ; would you
have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together
stern and bow,

'or a prize to Plymouth Sound ?
Better run the ships aground ! "
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
Not a minute more to wait !
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach !
France must undergo her fate.

V

Give the word ! " But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard ;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
—A Captain ? A Lieutenant ? A Mate—first, second, third ?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete !
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.*

VI

And " What mockery or malice have we here ? " cries Hervé Riel :
" Are you mad, you Malouins ? † Are you cowards, fools, or rogues ?

* Native of Le Croisic, a village at the mouth of the Loire.
† Natives of St. Malo.

Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took
the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every
swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the
river disembogues ?
Are you bought by English gold ? Is it love
the lying's for ?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of
Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France ? That were
worse than fifty Hogues !
Sirs, they know I speak the truth ! Sirs,
believe me there's a way !
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this ' Formidable ' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage
I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound
And if one ship misbehave—
Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I've nothing but my life—here's my
head ! " cries Hervé Riel.

VII

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage, as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past.
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,
Up the English come—too late!

VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,

Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on th
Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain'
countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!
Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front one more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward.
Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name'
not Damfreville."

X

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue :
'Since I needs may say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what
is it but a run ?—
Since 'tis ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come ! A good whole holiday !
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the
Belle Aurore ! "
That he asked and that he got—nothing
more.

XI

Name and deed alike are lost :
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it
befell ;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone
to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence
England bore the bell.
Go to Paris : rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell

On the Louvre, face and flank !
You shall look long enough ere you come to
Hervé Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse !
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife
the Belle Aurore !

GOLD HAIR

A Story of Pornic

I

Oh, the beautiful girl, too white,
Who lived at Pornic, down by the sea,
Just where the sea and the Loire unite!
And a boasted name in Brittany
She bore, which I will not write.

II

Too white, for the flower of life is red;
Her flesh was the soft seraphic screen
Of a soul that is meant (her parents said)
To just see earth, and hardly be seen,
And blossom in heaven instead.

III

Yet earth saw one thing, one how fair!
One grace that grew to its full on earth:
Smiles might be sparse on her cheek so spare,
And her waist want half a girdle's girth,
But she had her great gold hair.

IV

Hair, such a wonder of flix and floss,
Freshness and fragrance—floods of it, too!
Gold, did I say? Nay, gold's mere dross:
Here, Life smiled, "Think what I meant to do!"
And Love sighed, "Fancy my loss!"

V

So, when she died, it was scarce more strange
  Than that, when delicate evening dies,
And you follow its spent sun's pallid range,
  There's a shoot of colour startles the skies
With sudden, violent change,—

VI

That, while the breath was nearly to seek,
  As they put the little cross to her lips,
She changed ; a spot came out on her cheek,
  A spark from her eye in mid-eclipse,
And she broke forth, " I must speak ! "

VII

" Not my hair ! " made the girl her moan—
  " All the rest is gone or to go ;
" But the last, last grace, my all, my own,
  " Let it stay in the grave, that the ghost
      may know !
" Leave my poor gold hair alone ! "

VIII

The passion thus vented, dead lay she ;
  Her parents sobbed their worst on that ;
All friends joined in, nor observed degree :
  For indeed the hair was to wonder at,
As it spread—not flowing free.

IX

ut curled around her brow, like a crown,
And coiled beside her cheeks, like a cap,
nd calmed about her neck—ay, down
To her breast, pressed flat, without a gap
the gold, it reached her gown.

X

ll kissed that face, like a silver wedge
'Mid the yellow wealth, nor disturbed its hair:
'en the priest allowed death's privilege,
As he planted the crucifix with care
n her breast, 'twixt edge and edge.

XI

nd thus was she buried, inviolate
Of body and soul, in the very space
y the altar; keeping saintly state
In Pornic church, for her pride of race,
ure life and piteous fate.

XII

nd in after-time would your fresh tear fall,
Though your mouth might twitch with a dubious smile,
s they told you of gold, both robe and pall,
How she prayed them leave it alone awhile,
o it never was touched at all.

XIII

Years flew ; this legend grew at last
The life of the lady ; all she had done,
All been, in the memories fading fast
Of lover and friend, was summed in one
Sentence survivors passed :

XIV

To wit, she was meant for heaven, not earth ;
Had turned an angel before the time :
Yet, since she was mortal, in such dearth
Of frailty, all you could count a crime
Was—she knew her gold hair's worth.

XV

At little pleasant Pornic church.
It chanced, the pavement wanted repair,
Was taken to pieces : left in the lurch,
A certain sacred space lay bare,
And the boys began research.

XVI

'Twas the space where our sires would lay a saint,
A benefactor,—a bishop, suppose,
A baron with armour-adornments quaint,
Dame with chased ring and jewelled rose,
Things sanctity saves from taint ;

XVII

› we come to find them in after-days
When the corpse is presumed to have done with gauds
f use to the living, in many ways :
For the boys get pelf, and the town applauds,
nd the church deserves the praise.

XVIII

hey grubbed with a will : and at length—
O cor
Humanum, pectora coeca, and the rest !—
hey found—no gaud they were prying for,
No ring, no rose, but—who would have guessed ?—
double Louis-d'or !

XIX

ere was a case for the priest : he heard,
Marked, inwardly digested, laid
inger on nose, smiled, " There's a bird
" Chirps in my ear " : then, " Bring a spade,
Dig deeper ! "—he gave the word.

XX

nd lo, when they came to the coffin-lid,
Or rotten planks which composed it once,
Vhy, there lay the girl's skull wedged amid
A mint of money, it served for the nonce
o hold in its hair-heaps hid !

XXI

Hid there ? Could the girl be wont
(She the stainless soul) to treasure up
Money, earth's trash and heaven's affront ?
Had a spider found out the communion-cup,
Was a toad in the christening-font ?

XXII

Truth is truth : too true it was.
Gold ! She hoarded and hugged it first,
Longed for it, leaned o'er it, loved it—alas—
Till the humour grew to a head and burst,
And she cried, at the final pass,—

XXIII

" Talk not of God, my heart is stone !
" Nor lover nor friend—be gold for both !
" Gold I lack ; and, my all, my own,
" It shall hide in my hair. I scarce die loth
" If they let my hair alone ! "

XXIV

Louis-d'or, some six times five,
And duly double, every piece.
Now do you see ? With the priest to shrive,
With parents preventing her soul's release
By kisses that kept alive,—

XXV

ith heaven's gold gates about to ope,
With friends' praise, gold-like, lingering still,
n instinct had bidden the girl's hand grope
For gold, the true sort—"Gold in heaven, if
you will;
But I keep earth's too, I hope."

XXVI

nough! The priest took the grave's grim
yield!
The parents, they eyed that price of sin
s if *thirty pieces* lay revealed
On the place *to bury strangers in*,
he hideous Potter's Field.

XXVII

ut the priest bethought him: "'Milk that's
spilt'
"—You know the adage! Watch and pray!
Saints tumble to earth with so slight a tilt!
"It would build a new altar; that, we may!"
nd the altar therewith was built.

XXVIII

hy I deliver this horrible verse?
As the text of a sermon, which now I preach:
vil or good may be better or worse
In the human heart, but the mixture of each
a marvel and a curse.

XXIX

The candid incline to surmise of late
That the Christian faith proves false, I find
For our Essays-and-Reviews' debate
Begins to tell on the public mind,
And Colenso's words have weight :

XXX

I still, to suppose it true, for my part,
See reasons and reasons ; this, to begin :
'Tis the faith that launched point-blank h
dart
At the head of a lie—taught Original Sin,
The Corruption of Man's Heart.

THE POET SPEAKS

(In Propriâ Personâ)

HOUSE

I

all I sonnet-sing you about myself ?
Do I live in a house you would like to see ?
it scant of gear, has it store of pelf ?
" Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key ? "

II

vite the world, as my betters have done ?
" Take notice : this building remains on view,
ts suites of reception every one,
" Its private apartment and bedroom too ;

III

For a ticket, apply to the Publisher."
No : thanking the public, I must decline.
peep through my window, if folk prefer ;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine !

IV

ave mixed with a crowd and heard free talk
In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced :
d a house stood gaping, nought to baulk
Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

V

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,
The inside gaped : exposed to day,
Right and wrong and common and queer,
Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay.

VI

The owner ? Oh, he had been crushed,
doubt !
" Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealt
" What a parcel of musty old books about !
" He smoked,—no wonder he lost his healt

VII

" I doubt if he bathed before he dressed.
" A brasier ?—the pagan, he burned p
fumes !
" You see it is proved, what the neighbo
guessed :
" His wife and himself had separate room

VIII

Friends, the goodman of the house at least
Kept house to himself till an earthqu
came :
'Tis the fall of its frontage permits you feas
On the inside arrangement you praise
blame.

IX

tside should suffice for evidence :
And whoso desires to penetrate
eper, must dive by the spirit-sense—
No optics like yours, at any rate !

X

Ioity toity ! A street to explore,
'Your house the exception ! '*With this*
same key
hakespeare unlocked his heart,' once more ! "
Did Shakespeare ? If so, the less Shake-
speare he !

ONE WORD MORE*

TO E. B. B.

[1855]

I

There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished !
Take them, Love, the book and me together
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas :
These, the world might view—but one, t
volume.
Who that one, you ask ? Your heart instruc
you.
Did she live and love it all her lifetime ?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,

* Originally appended to the collection of poems cal
Men and Women, the greater portion of which has n
been more correctly distributed under the other titles
this edition.—R. B.

afael's cheek so duteous and so loving—
heek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
afael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's ?

III

ou and I would rather read that volume,
'aken to his beating bosom by it)
ean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
'ould we not ? than wonder at Madonnas—
er, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
er, that visits Florence in a vision,
er, that's left with lilies in the Louvre—
een by us and all the world in circle.

IV

ou and I will never read that volume
uido Reni, like his own eye's apple,
uarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
uido Reni dying, all Bologna
ried, and the world cried too, " Ours, the
treasure ! "
uddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

ante once prepared to paint an angel :
Vhom to please ? You whisper " Beatrice."
Vhile he mused and traced it and retraced it,
Peradventure with a pen corroded
till by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
Vhen, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,

Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle
Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he—" Certain people of importance "
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
" Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet : " Then I stopped my painting."

VI

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not ?—than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those " people of importance "
We and Bice bear the loss for ever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture ?
This : no artist lives and loves, that longs no
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize !) to find his love a language

it and fair and simple and sufficient—
sing nature that's an art to others,
ot, this one time, art that's turned his nature.
y, of all the artists living, loving,
one but would forego his proper dowry,—
oes he paint ? he fain would write a poem,—
oes he write ? he fain would paint a picture,
ut to proof art alien to the artist's,
nce, and only once, and for one only,
o to be the man and leave the artist,
ain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore ? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement !
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked—" Shall smiting help us ? "
When they drank and sneered—" A stroke is easy ! "
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks—" But drought was pleasant."

Thus old memories mar the actual triumph ;
Thus the doing savours of disrelish ;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat ;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness—the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—
" How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us ? "
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel—
" Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the drought was better."

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant !
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy you dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert ;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me:
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own,
Love!

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us—
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets.
He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro' silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,

Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving :
I am mine and yours—the rest be all men's.
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence :
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished ;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also !
Poor the speech ; be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me ! Lo, the moon's self !
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with colour,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the houseroofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there's nothing in the moon noteworthy ?
Nay : for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),
All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman—
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—him, even !
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal—
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better !
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals ?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain ?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also !

XVII

What were seen ? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure—the sight were other,

Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you—yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you—
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom!

R. B.

From THE RING AND THE BOOK

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory—to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
—Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn

For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

III. SONGS AND FANTASIES

The verse sprawls like the trees; dances like the dust. It is ragged like the thunder-cloud; it is top-heavy like the toadstool.

G. K. Chesterton.

Start with Browning where we will we are apt to come back, at last, to his lyrical gift.

Prof. Oliver Elton.

From PIPPA PASSES

A king lived long ago,
In the morning of the world,
When earth was nigher heaven than now :
And the king's locks curled,
Disparting o'er a forehead full
As the milk-white space 'twixt horn and horn
Of some sacrificial bull—
Only calm as a babe new-born :
For he was got to a sleepy mood,
So safe from all decrepitude,
Age with its bane, so sure gone by,
(The gods so loved him while he dreamed)
That, having lived thus long, there seemed
No need the king should ever die.
Among the rocks his city was :
Before his palace, in the sun,
He sat to see his people pass ;
And judge them every one.
From its threshold of smooth stone
They haled him many a valley-thief
Caught in the sheep-pens, robber-chief
Swarthy and shameless, beggar-cheat,
Spy-prowler, or rough pirate found
On the sea-sand left aground ;
And sometimes clung about his feet,
With bleeding lip and burning cheek
A woman, bitterest wrong to speak

Of one with sullen thickset brows :
And sometimes from the prison-house
The angry priests a pale wretch brought,
Who through some chink had pushed and pressed
On knees and elbows, belly and breast,
Worm-like into the temple,—caught
He was by the very god,
Who ever in the darkness strode
Backward and forward, keeping watch
O'er his brazen bowls, such rogues to catch !
These, all and every one,
The king judged, sitting in the sun.
His councillors, on left and right,
Looked anxious up,—but no surprise
Disturbed the king's old smiling eyes
Where the very blue had turned to white.
'Tis said, a Python scared one day
The breathless city, till he came,
With forky tongue and eyes on flame,
Where the old king sat to judge alway ;
But when he saw the sweepy hair
Girt with a crown of berries rare
Which the god will hardly give to wear
To the maiden who singeth, dancing bare
In the altar-smoke by the pine-torch lights,
At his wondrous forest rites,—
Seeing this, he did not dare
Approach that threshold in the sun,
Assault the old king smiling there.
Such grace had kings when the world begun !

From PIPPA PASSES

The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn ;
Morning's at seven ;
The hill-side's dew-pearled ;
The lark's on the wing ;
The snail's on the thorn ;
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world !

The bee with his comb,
The mouse at her dray,
The grub in his tomb,
Wile winter away ;
But the fire-fly and hedge-shrew and low-worm,
I pray,
How fare they ?

From PIPPA PASSES

You'll love me yet !—and I can tarry
  Your love's protracted growing :
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
  From seeds of April's sowing.

I plant a heartful now : some seed
  At least is sure to strike,
And yield—what you'll not pluck indeed,
  Not love, but, may be, like.

You'll look at least on love's remains,
  A grave's one violet :
Your look ?—that pays a thousand pains.
  What's death ? You'll love me yet !

SONG

I

Nay but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress ?
Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her ?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall ?

II

Because, you spend your lives in praising ;
To praise, you search the wide world over :
Then why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her ?
Above this tress, and this, I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much !

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

I

Let's contend no more, Love,
  Strive nor weep:
All be as before, Love,
  —Only sleep!

II

What so wild as words are?
  I and thou
In debate, as birds are,
  Hawk on bough!

III

See the creature stalking
  While we speak!
Hush and hide the talking,
  Cheek on cheek!

IV

What so false as truth is,
  False to thee?
Where the serpent's tooth is
  Shun the tree—

V

Where the apple reddens
  Never pry—
Lest we lose our Edens,
  Eve and I.

VI

Be a god and hold me
With a charm!
Be a man and fold me
With thine arm!

VII

Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought—

VIII

Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands.

IX

That shall be to-morrow
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight:

X

—Must a little weep, Love,
(Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, Love,
Loved by thee.

EVELYN HOPE

I

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass;
Little has yet been changed, I think:
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

II

Sixteen years old when she died!
Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name;
It was not her time to love; beside,
Her life had many a hope and aim,
Duties enough and little cares,
And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—
And the sweet white brow is all of her.

III

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?
What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
Made you of spirit, fire and dew—

And just because I was thrice as old
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was nought to each, must I be told ?
We were fellow mortals, nought beside ?

IV

No, indeed ! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love :
I claim you still, for my own love's sake !
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few :
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

V

But the time will come,—at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay ?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red—
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

VI

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes ;

Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? Let us see!

VII

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while.
My heart seemed full as it could hold?
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.
So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep:
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

ONE WAY OF LOVE

I

All June I bound the rose in sheaves.
Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves
And strew them where Pauline may pass.
She will not turn aside? Alas!
Let them lie. Suppose they die?
The chance was they might take her eye.

II

How many a month I strove to suit
These stubborn fingers to the lute!
To-day I venture all I know.
She will not hear my music? So!
Break the string; fold music's wing:
Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

III

My whole life long I learned to love.
This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion—heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'Tis well!
Lose who may—I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they!

ANOTHER WAY OF LOVE

I

June was not over
  Though past the full,
And the best of her roses
  Had yet to blow,
  When a man I know
(But shall not discover,
  Since ears are dull,
And time discloses)

Turned him and said with a man's true air,
Half sighing a smile in a yawn, as 'twere,—
" If I tire of your June, will she greatly care ? "

II

Well, dear, in-doors with you !
  True ! serene deadness
Tries a man's temper.
  What's in the blossom
  June wears on her bosom ?
Can it clear scores with you ?
  Sweetness and redness.
  Eadem semper !

Go, let me care for it greatly or slightly !
If June mend her bower now, your hand left unsightly
By plucking the roses,—my June will do rightly.

III

And after, for pastime,
If June be refulgent
With flowers in completeness,
All petals, no prickles,
Delicious as trickles
Of wine poured at mass-time,—
And choose One indulgent
To redness and sweetness :

Or if, with experience of man and spider,
June use my June-lightning, the strong insect-ridder,
And stop the fresh film-work,—why, June will consider.

MEMORABILIA

I

Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,
  And did he stop and speak to you
And did you speak to him again ?
  How strange it seems and new !

II

But you were living before that,
  And also you are living after ;
And the memory I started at—
  My starting moves your laughter.

III

I crossed a moor, with a name of its own
  And a certain use in the world no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
  'Mid the blank miles round about :

IV

For there I picked up on the heather
  And there I put inside my breast
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather !
  Well, I forget the rest.

LOVE IN A LIFE

I

Room after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her—
Next time, herself!—not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew:
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

II

Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune—
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares?
But 'tis twilight, you see,—with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

LIFE IN A LOVE

Escape me ?
Never—
Beloved !
While I am I, and you are you,
So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear :
It seems too much like a fate, indeed !
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed.
But what if I fail of my purpose here ?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And, baffled, get up and begin again,—
So the chace takes up one's life, that's all.
While, look but once from your farthest bound
At me so deep in the dust and dark,
No sooner the old hope goes to ground
Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,
I shape me—
Ever
Removed !

NATURAL MAGIC

I

All I can say is—I saw it!
The room was as bare as your hand,
I locked in the swarth little lady,—I swear,
From the head to the foot of her—well, quite as bare!
"No Nautch shall cheat me," said I, "taking my stand
At this bolt which I draw!" And this bolt —I withdraw it,
And there laughs the lady, not bare, but embowered
With—who knows what verdure, o'erfruited, o'erflowered?
Impossible! Only—I saw it!

II

All I can sing is—I feel it!
This life was as blank as that room;
I let you pass in here. Precaution indeed?
Walls, ceiling and floor,—not a chance for a weed
Wide opens the entrance: where's cold now, where's gloom?
No May to sow seed here, no June to reveal it
Behold you enshrined in these blooms of your bringing,
These fruits of your bearing—nay, birds of your winging!
A fairy-tale! Only—I feel it!

CAVALIER TUNES

I—MARCHING ALONG

I

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

II

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're—

Chorus: Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

III

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!

England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here
Chorus: Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen singing this song.

IV

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarl
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight
Chorus: March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen singing this song!

II—GIVE A ROUSE

I

King Charles, and who'll do him right now
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

II

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?

Who helped me to gold I spent since ?
Who found me in wine you drank once ?
Chorus : King Charles, and who'll do him right now ?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now ?
Give a rouse : here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles !

III

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him ?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him ?
Chorus : King Charles, and who'll do him right now ?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now ?
Give a rouse : here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles !

III—BOOT AND SADDLE

I

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away !
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silver grey,
Chorus : Boot, saddle, to horse, and away !

II

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
" God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay

Chorus : " Boot, saddle, to horse, and away ! "

III

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads array :
Who laughs, " Good fellows ere this, by my fay,

Chorus : " Boot, saddle, to horse, and away ! "

IV

Who ? My wife Gertrude ; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, " Nay
" I've better counsellors ; what counsel they

Chorus : " Boot, saddle, to horse, and away ! "

"HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX"

I

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
"Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths right,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique tight,
Rebuckled the check-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we
drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned
clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Düffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the
half-chime,
So, Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

IV

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black everyone,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

V

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear
bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on
his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,—ever that
glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master,
askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye
and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on,

VI

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris,
"Stay spur!
"Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's not
in her,
"We'll remember at Aix"—for one heard the
quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and
staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and
sank.

VII

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and post Tongres, no cloud in the
sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble
like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in
sight!"

VIII

"How they'll greet us!"—and all in a moment
his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole
weight

Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X

And all I remember is—friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR

[Abd-el-Kadr was an Arab Chief of Algiers who resisted the French in 1833].

I

As I ride, as I ride,
With a heart full for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side,
As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is descried, ways untried
As I ride, as I ride.

II

As I ride, as I ride
To our Chief and his Allied,
Who dares chide my heart's pride
As I ride, as I ride ?
Or are witnesses denied—
Through the desert waste and wide
Do I glide unespied
As I ride, as I ride ?

III

As I ride, as I ride,
When an inner voice has cried,

The sands slide, nor abide
(As I ride, as I ride)
O'er each visioned homicide
That came vaunting (has he lied ?)
To reside—where he died,
As I ride, as I ride.

IV

As I ride, as I ride,
Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,
Yet his hide, streaked and pied,
As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
—Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed—
How has vied stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride !

V

As I ride, as I ride,
Could I loose what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide
(As I ride, as I ride)
All that's meant me—satisfied
When the Prophet and the Bride
Stop veins I'd have subside
As I ride, as I ride !

GARDEN FANCIES

I

THE FLOWER'S NAME

Here's the garden she walked across,
  Arm in my arm, such a short while since :
Hark, now I push its wicket, the moss
  Hinders the hinges and makes them wince !
She must have reached this shrub ere she turned,
  As back with that murmur the wicket swung ;
For she laid the poor snail, my chance foot spurned.
  To feed and forget it the leaves among.

II

Down this side of the gravel-walk
  She went while her robe's edge brushed the box :
And here she paused in her gracious talk
  To point me a moth on the milk-white phlox.
Roses, ranged in valiant row,
  I will never think that she passed you by !
She loves you, noble roses, I know ;
  But yonder, see, where the rock-plants lie !

III

This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,
  Stooped over, in doubt, as settling its claim ;
Till she gave me, with pride to make no slip,
  Its soft meandering Spanish name :
What a name ! Was it love or praise ?
  Speech half-asleep or song half-awake ?
I must learn Spanish, one of these days,
  Only for that slow, sweet name's sake.

IV

Roses, if I live and do well,
  I may bring her, one of these days,
To fix you fast with as fine a spell,
  Fit you each with his Spanish phrase ;
But do not detain me now ; for she lingers
  There, like sunshine over the ground,
And ever I see her soft white fingers
  Searching after the bud she found.

V

Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,
  Stay as you are and be loved for ever !
Bud, if I kiss you 'tis that you blow not :
  Mind, the shut pink mouth opens never !
For while it pouts, her fingers wrestle,
  Twinkling the audacious leaves between,
Till round they turn and down they nestle—
  Is not the dear mark still to be seen ?

VI

Where I find her not, beauties vanish ;
Whither I follow her, beauties flee ;
Is there no method to tell her in Spanish
June's twice June since she breathed it with me ?
Come, bud, show me the least of her traces,
Treasure my lady's lightest footfall !
Ah, you may flout and turn up your faces—
Roses, you are not so fair after all !

MY STAR

All that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue ;
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue !

Then it stops like a bird ; like a flower, hangs furled :
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world ?
Mine has opened its soul to me ; therefore I love it.

From "ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY"

THAMURIS MARCHING

. . . . .

Thamuris marching—lyre and song of Thrace—
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race !)

Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there
By kingly Eurutos of late, now bound
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare

Of Mount Pangaios (ore with earth enwound
Glittered beneath his footstep)—marching gay
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and crowned,

From triumph on to triumph, mid a ray
Of early morn,—came, saw and knew the spot
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura—happier while its name was not—
Met him, but nowise menaced ; slipt aside,
Obsequious river to pursue its lot.

Of solacing the valley—say, some wide
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide.

Thamuris, marching, laughed " Each flake of
foam "
(As sparklingly the ripple raced him by)
" Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome ! "

For Autumn was the season ; red the sky
Held morn's conclusive signet of the sun
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

Morn had the mastery as, one by one
All pomps produced themselves along the tract
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun

Was there a ravaged tree ? it laughed compact
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high-brandished
now,
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined
About it, joined the rush of air and light
And force : the world was of one joyous mind

Say not the birds flew ! they forebore their
right—
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded ! that was
flight—

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings ?
Such earth's community of purpose, such
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings,—

So did the near and far appear to touch
I' the moment's transport—that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much ;

And had the rooted plant aspired to range
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange—

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned
To actual music, sang itself aloft ;
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

The right to soar embodied in some soft
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,
And blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip
Born of the fiery transport ; lyre and song
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip—

Peerless recorded, since the list grew long
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand
Pedestalled mid the Muses' temple-throng,

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,
(Ay, for we see them)—Thamuris of Thrace
Predominating foremost of the band.

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again
From flush to pride ; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from plain,
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed ?
Compounding these to one consummate strain.

It reached him, music ; but his own outburst
Of victory concluded the account,
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

" Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount !
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto ;
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount !

" Here I await the end of this ado ;
Which wins—Earth's poet or the Heavenly Muse." . . .

From GERARD DE LAIRESSE

Dance, yellows and whites and reds,—
Lead your gay orgy, leaves, stalks, heads
Astir with the wind in the tulip-beds !

There's sunshine ; scarcely a wind at all
Disturbs starved grass and daisies small
On a certain mound by a churchyard wall.

Daisies and grass be my heart's bedfellows
On the mound wind spares and sunshine mellows:
Dance you, reds and whites and yellows !

SUMMUM BONUM

All the breath and the bloom of the year in
the bag of one bee :
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the
heart of one gem :
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the
shine of the sea :
Breath and bloom, shade and shine,—wonder,
wealth, and—how far above them—
Truth, that's brighter than gem,
Trust, that's purer than pearl,—
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe—
all were for me
In the kiss of one girl.

THE PATRIOT

AN OLD STORY

I

It was roses, roses all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad :
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.

II

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
Had I said, " Good folk, mere noise repels—
" But give me your sun from yonder skies ! "
They had answered, " And afterward, what else ? "

III

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it my loving friends to keep !
Nought man could do, have I left undone :
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

IV

There's nobody on the house-tops now—
Just a palsied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

V

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

VI

Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
"Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
Me?"—God might question; now instead,
'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so.

SONG

I

Nay but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress ?
Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her ?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall ?

II

Because, you spend your lives in praising ;
To praise, you search the wide world over :
Then why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her ?
Above this tress, and this, I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much !

NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE

Never the time and the place
And the loved one all together!
This path—how soft to pace!
This May—what magic weather!
Where is the loved one's face?
In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,
But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
Where, outside, rain and wind combine
With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek,
With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
O enemy sly and serpentine,
Uncoil thee from the waking man!
Do I hold the Past
Thus firm and fast
Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?
This path so soft to pace shall lead
Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed!
Or narrow if needs the house must be,
Outside are the storms and strangers: we—
Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,
—I and she!

HOLY-CROSS DAY

On which the Jews were forced to attend an Annual Christian Sermon in Rome.

("Now was come about Holy-Cross Day, and now must my lord preach his first sermon to the Jews: as it was of old cared for in the merciful bowels of the Church, that, so to speak, a crumb at least from her conspicuous table here in Rome should be, though but once yearly, cast to the famishing dogs, under-trampled and bespitten-upon beneath the feet of the guests. And a moving sight in truth, this, of so many of the besotted blind restif and ready-to-perish Hebrews! now maternally brought—nay (for He saith, 'Compel them to come in') haled, as it were, by the head and hair, and against their obstinate hearts, to partake of the heavenly grace. What awakening, what striving with tears, what working of a yeasty conscience! Nor was my lord wanting to himself on so apt an occasion; witness the abundance of conversions which did incontinently reward him: though not to my lord be altogether the glory."—DIARY BY THE BISHOP'S SECRETARY, 1600.)

What the Jews really said, on thus being driven to church, was rather to this effect:

I

Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!
Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week.
Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff,
Take the church-road, for the bell's due chime
Gives us the summons—'tis sermon-time!

II

Boh, here's Barnabas! Job, that's you?
Up stumps Solomon—bustling too?
Shame, man! greedy beyond your years
To handsel the bishop's shaving-shears?
Fair play's a jewel! Leave friends in the lurch?
Stand on a line ere you start for the Church!

III

Higgledy, piggledy, packed we lie,
Rats in a hamper, swine in a stye,
Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve,
Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve.
Hist! square shoulders, settle your thumbs
And buzz for the bishop—here he comes.

IV

Bow, wow, wow—a bone for the dog!
I liken his Grace to an acorned hog.
What, a boy at his side, with the bloom of a lass,
To help and handle my lord's hour-glass!
Didst ever behold so lithe a chine?
His cheek hath laps like a fresh-singed swine.

V

Aaron's asleep—shove hip to haunch,
Or somebody deal him a dig in the paunch!

Look at the purse with the tassel and knob,
And the gown with the angel and thingumbob!
What's he at, quotha? reading his text!
Now you've his curtsey—and what comes next.

VI

See to our converts—you doomed black dozen—
No stealing away—nor cog nor cozen!
You five, that were thieves, deserve it fairly;
You seven, that were beggars, will live less sparely;
You took your turn and dipped in the hat,
Got fortune—and fortune gets you; mind that!

VII

Give your first groan—compunction's at work;
And soft! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.
Lo, Micah,—the selfsame beard on chin
He was four times already converted in!
Here's a knife, clip quick—it's a sign of grace—
Or he ruins us all with his hanging-face.

VIII

Whom now is the bishop a-leering at?
I know a point where his text falls pat.
I'll tell him to-morrow, a word just now
Went to my heart and made me vow
I meddle no more with the worst of trades—
Let somebody else pay his serenades.

IX

Groan all together now, whee—hee—hee!
It's a-work, it's a-work, ah, woe is me!
It began, when a herd of us, picked and placed,
Were spurred through the Corso, stripped to the waist
Jew brutes, with sweat and blood well spent
To usher in worthily Christian Lent.

X

It grew, when the hangman entered our bounds,
Yelled pricked us out to his church like hounds:
It got to a pitch, when the hand indeed
Which gutted my purse would throttle my creed:
And it overflows when, to even the odd,
Men I helped to their sins help me to their God.

XI

But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,
And the rest sit silent and count the clock,
Since forced to muse the appointed time
On these precious facts and truths sublime,—
Let us employ it, under our breath,
In saying Ben Ezra's Song of Death.

XII

For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons' sons to his side,
And spoke, "This world has been harsh and
strange;
Something is wrong: there needeth a change
But what, or where? at the last or first?
In one point only we sinned, at worst.

XIII

"The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
And again in His border see Israel set.
When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
The stranger-seed shall be joined to them:
To Jacob's House shall the Gentiles cleave.
So the Prophet saith and his sons believe.

XIV

"Ay, the children of the chosen race
Shall carry and bring them to their place:
In the land of the Lord shall lead the same
Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame
When the slaves enslave, the oppressed one
o'er
The oppressor triumph for evermore?

XV

"God spoke, and gave us the word to keep,
Bade never fold the hands nor sleep

'Mid a faithless world,—at watch and ward,
Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.
By His servant Moses the watch was set:
Though near upon cock-crow, we keep it yet.

XVI

"Thou! if thou wast He, who at mid-watch came,
By the starlight, naming a dubious name!
And if, too heavy with sleep—too rash
With fear—O Thou, if that martyr-gash
Fell on Thee coming to take thine own,
And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne—

XVII

"Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus,
But, the Judgment over, join sides with us!
Thine too is the cause! and not more thine
Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine,
Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed!
Who maintain Thee in word, and deft Thee in deed!

XVIII

"We withstood Christ then? Be mindful how
At least we withstand Barabbas now!
Was our outrage sore? But the worst we spared,

To have called these—Christians, had we
dared!
Let defiance to them pay mistrust to Thee,
And Rome made amends for Calvary!

XIX

"By the torture, prolonged from age to age,
By the infamy, Israel's heritage,
By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,
By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,
By the branding-tool, the bloody whip,
And the summons to Christian fellowship,—

XX

"We boast our proof that at least the Jew
Would wrest Christ's name from the Devil's
crew.
Thy face took never so deep a shade
But we fought them in it, God our aid!
A trophy to bear, as we march, thy band,
South, East, and on to the Pleasant Land!"

[Pope Gregory XVI abolished this bad business of the Sermon.—R. B.]

From PARACELSUS

Over the sea our galleys went,
With cleaving prows in order brave
To a speeding wind and a bounding wave,
A gallant armament;
Each back built out of a forest-tree
Left leafy and rough as first it grew,
And nailed all over the gaping sides,
Within and without, with black bull-hides
Seethed in fat and suppled in flame,
To bear the playful billows' game:
So, each good ship was rude to see,
Rude and bare to the outward view,
But each upbore a stately tent
Where cedar pales in scented row
Kept out the flakes of the dancing brine
And an awning drooped the mast below,
In fold on fold of the purple fine,
That neither noontide nor starshine
Nor moonlight cold which maketh mad,
Might pierce the regal tenement.
When the sun dawned, oh, gay and glad
We set the sail and plied the oar;
But when the night-wind blew like breath,
For joy of one day's voyage more,
We sang together on the wide sea,
Like men at peace on a peaceful shore;

Each sail was loosed to the wind so free,
Each helm made sure by the twilight star,
And in a sleep as calm as death,
We, the voyagers from afar,
Lay stretched along, each weary crew
In a circle round its wondrous tent
Whence gleamed soft light and curled rich
scent,
And with light and perfume, music too:
So the stars wheeled round, and the darkness
past,
And at morn we started beside the mast,
And still each ship was sailing fast.

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME"

I

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee that pursed and scored
Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare.

III

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wander
ing,
What with my search drawn out thro' years
my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would
bring,
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope

V

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each
friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside ("since all is o'er," he saith
"And the blow fallen no grieving can
amend;")

VI

While some discuss if near the other graves
Be room enough for this, and when a day
Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
With care about the banners, scarves and
staves:
And still the man hears all, and only craves
He may not shame such tender love and
stay.

VII

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among "The Band"—to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now—should I be fit?

VIII

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
That hateful cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

IX

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
I might go on; nought else remained to do.

X

So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:
For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove.

XI

No! penury, inertness and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion.
"See
"Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,
"It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
"'Tis the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place,
"Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

XII

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
Pushing their life out, with a brute's intents.

XIII

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy ; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there :
Thrust outpast service from the devil's stud !

XIV

Alive ? he might be dead for aught I know,
With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane ;
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe ;
I never saw a brute I hated so ;
He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

XV

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art :
One taste of the old time sets all to rights.

XVI

Not it ! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold

An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!
Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

XVII

Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands
Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.
Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! what hangman hands
Pin to his breast a parchment? His own bands
Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

XVIII

Better this present than a past like that;
Back therefore to my darkening path again!
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
I asked: when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

XX

So petty yet so spiteful! All along,
Low scrubby olders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

XXI

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
—It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

XXII

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country. Vain presage!
Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a plash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

XXIII

The fight must so have seemed in that fell
cirque.
What penned them there, with all the plain
to choose ?
No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
None out of it. Mad brewage set to work
Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the
Turk
Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

XXIV

And more than that—a furlong on—why,
there !
What bad use was that engine for, that
wheel,
Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk ? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of
steel.

XXV

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a
wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere
earth
Desperate and done with ; (so a fool finds
mirth,

Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes !) within a rood—
Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

XXVI

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
Broke into moss or substances like boils;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII

And just as far as ever from the end !
Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
To point my footstep further ! At the thought
A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains—with such name to grace

Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you!
How to get from them was no clearer case.

XXIX

Yet half I seemed to recognise some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As when a trap shuts—you're inside the den!

XXX

Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place! those two hills on the right,
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
After a life spent training for the sight!

XXXI

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
Built of brown stone, without a counterpart

In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

XXXII

Not see? because of night perhaps?—why, day
Came back again for that! before it left,
The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
"Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!"

XXXIII

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
And such was fortunate, yet each of old
Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

XXXIV

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

A Child's Story

I

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

II

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

III

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking :
" 'Tis clear," cried they, " our Mayor's a noddy ;
" And as for our Corporation—shocking
" To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
" For dolts that can't or won't determine
" What's best to rid us of our vermin !
" You hope, because you're old and obese,
" To find in the furry civic robe ease ?
" Rouse up, sirs ! Give your brains a racking
" To find the remedy we're lacking,
" Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing ! "
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV

An hour they sat in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence :
" For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell,
" I wish I were a mile hence !
" It's easy to bid one rack one's brain—
" I'm sure my poor head aches again,
" I've scratched it so, and all in vain.
" Oh, for a trap, a trap, a trap ! "
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber door but a gentle tap ?
" Bless us," cried the Mayor, " what's that ? "

(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat ;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous.)
" Only a scraping of shoes on the mat ?
" Anything like the sound of a rat
" Makes my heart go pit-a-pat ! "

V

" Come in ! "—the Mayor cried, looking bigger :
And in did come the strangest figure !
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in ;
There was no guessing his kith and kin :
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one : " It's as my great-grandsire,
" Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
" Had walked this way from his painted tomb-
stone ! "

VI

He advanced to the council-table :
And, " Please your honours," said he, " I'm able,

" By means of a secret charm, to draw
" All creatures living beneath the sun,
" That creep or swim or fly or run,
" After me so as you never saw!
" And I chiefly use my charm
" On creatures that do people harm,
" The mole and toad and newt and viper;
" And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
" Yet," said he, " poor piper as I am,
" In Tartary I freed the Cham,
" Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;
" I eased in Asia the Nizam
" Of a monstrous brood of vampyre-bats:
" And as for what your brain bewilders,
" If I can rid your town of rats
" Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
" One? Fifty thousand!"—was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

VII

Into the street the Piper stept,
  Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
  In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
  Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
  Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser,
  Wherein all plunged and perished!
—Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar,
Swam across and lived to carry
  (As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary:

Which was, "At the first shrill notes of the
pipe,
"I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
"And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
"Into a cider-press's gripe:
"And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
"And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
"And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
"And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
"And it seemed as if a voice
"(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
"Is breathed) called out, 'Oh rats, rejoice!
"'The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!
"'So munch on, crunch on, take your nun-
cheon,
'Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!'
'And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
'All ready staved, like a great sun shone
'Glorious scarce an inch before me,
'Just as methought it said, 'Come, bore me!'
"—I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

VIII

You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
'Go," said the Mayor, "and get long poles,
'Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
'Consult with carpenters and builders,
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!"—when suddenly, up the face

Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a, "First, if you please, my thousand guilders!"

IX

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
So did the Corporation too.
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gipsy coat of red and yellow!
"Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
"Our business was done at the river's brink;
"We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
"And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
"So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
"From the duty of giving you something for drink,
"And a matter of money to put in your poke;
"But as for the guilders, what we spoke
"Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
"Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
"A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

X

The Piper's face fell, and he cried
"No trifling! I can't wait, beside!

" I've promised to visit by dinner-time
" Bagdat, and accept the prime
" Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,
" For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
" Of a nest of scorpions no survivor :
" With him I proved no bargain-driver,
" With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver !
" And folks who put me in a passion
" May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI

" How ? " cried the Mayor, " d'ye think I brook
" Being worse treated than a Cook ?
" Insulted by a lazy ribald
" With idle pipe and vesture piebald ?
" You threaten us, fellow ? Do your worst,
" Blow your pipe there till you burst ! "

XII

Once more he stept into the street
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane ;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,

Little hands clapping and little tongues
chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is
scattering,
Out came the children running,
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and
laughter.

XIII

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
As if they were changed into blocks of wood
Unable to move a step, or cry
To the children merrily skipping by,
—Could only follow with the eye
That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
But now the Mayor was on the rack,
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
As the Piper turned from the High Street
To where the Weser rolled its waters
Right in the way of their sons and daughters
However he turned from South to West,
And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,
And after him the children pressed;
Great was the joy in every breast.
"He never can cross that mighty top!
"He's forced to let the piping drop,

" And we shall see our children stop ! "
When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,
A wondrous portal opened wide,
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed ;
And the Piper advanced and the children followed,
And when all were in to the very last,
The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
Did I say, all ? No ! One was lame,
And could not dance the whole of the way ;
And in after years, if you would blame
His sadness, he was used to say,—
" It's dull in our town since my playmates left !
" I can't forget that I'm bereft
" Of all the pleasant sights they see,
" Which the Piper also promised me.
" For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
" Joining the town and just at hand,
" Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew
" And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
" And everything was strange and new ;
" The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
" And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
" And honey-bees had lost their stings,
" And horses were born with eagles' wings :
" And just as I became assured
" My lame foot would be speedily cured,
" The music stopped and I stood still,
" And found myself outside the hill,

" Left alone against my will,
" To go now limping as before,
" And never hear of that country more ! "

XIV

Alas, alas for Hamelin !
  There came into many a burgher's pate
  A text which says that heaven's gate
  Opes to the rich at as easy rate
As the needle's eye takes a camel in !
The Mayor sent East, West, North and South,
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
  Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he'd only return the way he went,
  And bring the children behind him.
But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour,
And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,
They made a decree that lawyers never
  Should think their records dated duly
If, after the day of the month and year,
These words did not as well appear,
" And so long after what happened here
  " On the Twenty-second of July,
" Thirteen hundred and seventy-six " :
And the better in memory to fix
The place of the children's last retreat,
They called it, the Pied Piper's Street—
Where anyone playing on pipe or tabor
Was sure for the future to lose his labour.

Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
  To shock with mirth a street so solemn ;
But opposite the place of the cavern
  They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted
The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.
And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there's a tribe
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don't understand.

XV

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers
Of scores out with all men—especially pipers !
And, whether they pipe us free from rats or
  from mice,
If we've promised them aught, let us keep our
  promise !

IV.—THE POET'S OUTLOOK ON LIFE

"How good is man's life the mere living
Now fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for
ever in joy."

Saul.

"Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea
Loves t'have his sails fill'd with a lusty wind."

CHAPMAN.

"His voice sounds loudest and also clearest for the things that as a race we like best . . . the vitality of the will, the validity of character, the seriousness, above all, of great human passion."

HENRY JAMES.

From PARACELSUS

To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
To know even hate is but a mask of love's,
To see a good in evil, and a hope
In ill-success ; to sympathize, be proud
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts ;
All with a touch of nobleness, despite
Their error, upward trending all though weak,
Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him.

From SORDELLO

Heaven, rose again, and, naked at his feet,
Lighted his old life's every shift and change,
Effort with counter-effort ; nor the range
Of each looked wrong except wherein it checked,
Some other—which of these could he suspect,
Prying into them by the sudden blaze ?
The real way seemed made up of all the ways—
Mood after mood of the one mind in him ;
Tokens of the existence, bright or dim,
Of a transcendent all-embracing sense
Demanding only outward influence,
A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul,
Power to uplift his power. . . .

Hence
Must truth be casual truth, elicited
In sparks so mean, at intervals dispread
So rarely, that 'tis like at no one time
Of the world's story has not truth, the prime
Of truth, the very truth which, loosed, had hurled
The world's course right, been really in the world
—Content the while with some mean spark by dint
Of some chance-blow, the solitary hint

Of buried fire, which, rip earth's breast, would stream
Sky-ward !

" . . . for, what is joy ?—to heave
" Up one obstruction more, and common leave
" What was peculiar, by such act destroy
" Itself ; a partial death is every joy ;
" The sensible escape, enfranchisement
" Of a sphere's essence : once the vexed—content,
" The cramped—at large, the growing circle—round,
" All's to begin again—some novel bound
" To break, some new enlargement to entreat ;
" The sphere, though larger is not more complete.
" Now for Mankind's experience : who alone
" Might style the unobstructed world his own ?
" Whom palled Goito with its perfect things ?
" Sordello's self : whereas for Mankind springs
" Salvation by each hindrance interposed.
" They climb ; life's view is not at once disclosed
" To creatures caught up, on the summit left,
" Heaven plain above them, yet of wings bereft :
" But lower laid, as at the mountain's foot.
" So, range on range, the girdling forests shoot

" 'Twixt your plain prospect and the throngs who scale
" Height after height, and pierce mists, veil by veil,
" Heartened by each discovery ; in their soul,
" The Whole they seek by Parts—but, found that Whole . . .

From BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

. . . How can we guard our unbelief,
Make it bear fruit to us ?—the problem here.
Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, someone's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
The grand Perhaps ! We look on helplessly.
There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—
This good God,—what he could do, if he would,
Would, if he could—then must have done long since :
If so, when, where and how ? Some way must be,—
Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
Why not, " The Way, the Truth, the Life ? "

From ABT VOGLER

X

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by.

XI

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?

Why rushed the discords in but that harmony should be prized ?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe :
But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear ;
The rest may reason and welcome : 'tis we musicians know.

XII

Well, it is earth with me ; silence resumes her reign :
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again.
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—yes,
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep ;
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is found,
The C Major of this life : so, now I will try to sleep.

RABBI BEN EZRA

I

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
"Youth shows but half; trust God: see all
nor be afraid!"

II

Not that, amassing flowers,
Youth sighed "Which rose make ours,
"Which lily leave and then as best recall?"
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned "Nor Jove, nor Mars;
"Mine be some figured flame which blends,
transcends them all!"

III

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,
Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark!
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men;
Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

V

Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

VI

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

VII

For thence,—a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks,—

Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not
sink i' the scale.

VIII

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
To man, propose this test—
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

IX

Yet gifts should prove their use:
I own the Past profuse
Of power each side, perfection every turn:
Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole;
Should not the heart beat once "How good
to live and learn"?

X

Not once beat "Praise be Thine!
"I see the whole design,
"I, who saw power, see now love perfect too:
"Perfect I call Thy plan:
"Thanks that I was a man!
"Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what
Thou shalt do!"

XI

For pleasant is this flesh;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest;
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best!

XII

Let us not always say
"Spite of this flesh to-day
"I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry "All good things
"Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!"

XIII

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a god though in the germ.

XIV

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone

Once more on my adventure brave and new:
Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

XV

Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or losses thereby;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold.
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame:
Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

XVI

For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the grey:
A whisper from the west
Shoots—"Add this to the rest,
"Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."

XVII

So, still within this life,
Though lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right i' the main,
"That acquiescence vain:
"The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

XVIII

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:
Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

XIX

As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found made:
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedest age: wait death nor be afraid!

XX

Enough now, if the Right
And Good and Infinite
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

XXI

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,

Announced to each his station in the Past!
Was I, the world arraigned,
Were they, my soul disdained,
Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work," must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

XXVI

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

XXVII

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

XXVIII

He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest :
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

XXIX

What though the earlier grooves
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press ?
What though, about thy rim,
Skull-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress ?

XXX

Look not thou down but up !
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips a-glow !
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou with earth's wheel ?

XXXI

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who mouldest men ;
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
Did I,—to the wheel of life
With shapes and colours rife,
Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy
thirst :

XXXII

So, take and use Thy work :
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past
the aim !
My times be in Thy hand !
Perfect the cup as planned !
Let age approve of youth, and death complete
the same !

From PROSPICE

I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last !
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes
and forbore,
And bade me creep past.

From THE RING AND THE BOOK

(*Book VI: Caponsacchi*)

Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
So very pitiable, she and I,
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat!
Apart from truth's sake, what's to move so much?
Pompilia will be presently with God;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now: but priests
Should study passion; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes?
I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
By the higher call,—since you will have it so,—
Leads it companioned by the woman there.
To live and see her learn, and learn by her,
Out of the low obscure and petty world—
Or only see one purpose and one will
Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong
to right:
To have to do with nothing but the true,
The good, the eternal—and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day,
Concerns of the particular hearth and home:

To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God—
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream!—
Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, "Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!"—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content. . . .

From THE RING AND THE BOOK

(*Book X: The Pope*)

"We fools dance thro' the cornfield of this life,
"Pluck ears to left and right and swallow raw,
"—Nay, tread, at pleasure, a sheaf underfoot,
"To get the better at some poppy-flower,—
"Well aware we shall have so much less wheat
"In the eventual harvest: you meantime
"Waste not a spike,—the richlier will you reap!
"What then? There will be always garnered meal
"Sufficient for our comfortable loaf,
"While you enjoy the undiminished sack!"
Is it not this ignoble confidence,
Cowardly hardihood, that dulls and damps,
Makes the old heroism impossible?

FIFINE AT THE FAIR

From PROLOGUE

XIX

Does she look, pity, wonder
At one who mimics flight,
Swims—heaven above, sea under,
Yet always earth in sight ?

From FIFINE AT THE FAIR

LXXXVIII

A poet never dreams :
We prose-folk always do : we miss the proper duct
For thoughts on things unseen, which stagnate and obstruct
The system, therefore ; mind, sound in a body sane,
Keeps thoughts apart from facts, and to one flowing vein
Confines its sense of that which is not, but might be,
And leaves the rest alone. . . .

PACCHIAROTTO*

From EPILOGUE

XX

Man's thoughts and loves and hates!
  Earth is my vineyard, these grew there:
From grape of the ground, I made or marred
My vintage; easy the task or hard,
Who sets it—his praise be my reward!
  Earth's yield! Who yearn for the Dark
    Blue Sea's,
Let them "lay, pray, bray"—the addle-pates!
Mine be Man's thoughts, loves, hates!

* A light-hearted tale of a poor painter who comes to grief in a futile effort to reform his fellows. Incidentally, the poet takes the opportunity to trounce his critics.

ASOLANDO

EPILOGUE

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
—Pity me?

Oh, to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken?
What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
—Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever
There as here!"

A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON BROWNING LITERATURE

(An asterisk is placed against those volumes which are of especial value to the student.)

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL:

Robert Browning, by William Sharp. Scott (1890).

**Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, by Mrs. Sutherland Orr. (1891.)

Browning, by Arthur Waugh ("Westminster Biographies," 1900.)

Robert Browning, by Edward Dowden ("The Temple Biographies"). Dent (1904).

**Robert Browning*, by G. K. Chesterton. Macmillan (1904).

**Robert Browning*, by C. H. Herford ("Modern English Writers"). Blackwood (1905).

**Life of Robert Browning*, by W. Hall Griffin and H. C. Minchin. Methuen (1910).

Love Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. Letters (privately printed—two volumes) by T. J. Wise (1895–96).

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY: LITERARY:

Handbook on Browning, by Mrs. Sutherland Orr (1885). (Revised by F. G. Kenyon, 1908.)

**Introduction to the Study of Browning*, by Arthur Symons. (1886.)

Studies of the Mind and Art of Robert Browning, by James Fotheringham. Horace Marshall (1887).

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY: LITERARY—*continued.*

(The poet's impression of this critical estimate: "There is just come out a very noticeable book—*Studies on R. B.*, by a Mr. Fotheringham, whose name even I have never heard before. I obtained the loan of a copy two days ago, not having been graced by the gift of one from the author nor publisher, and it is a very remarkable instance—so far as I have read, perhaps one-tenth of it—of the interest a complete stranger can take in very unintelligible work.")†

Browning's Cyclopædia (Berdoe). (1892.)
Browning and Whitman, by Oscar L. Triggs. Swan Sonnenschien (1893).
**Robert Browning* (*Essays and Thoughts*), by J. T. Nettleship. John Lane (1901).
**Browning*, by Stopford A. Brooke. Isbister (1902).
Browning Studies, by E. Berdoe.
**Browning and His Poetry*, by Ernest Rhys. George Harrap & Co. (A useful little introduction.)

ANECDOTAL:

**Personalia*, by Edmund Gosse. (1890.)
Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning, by Lady Ritchie. (1896.)
Tennyson: A memoir, by Hallam Tennyson. Macmillan (1897).
Memories of Half a Century, by R. C. Lehmann.
Some Reminiscences, by W. M. Rossetti.

PHILOSOPHICAL:

Browning Society Papers, edited by F. J. Furnivall.
Browning's Criticism of Life, by William F. Revell. (1897.)

† From an unpublished letter.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

**Leaders of Religious Thought*, by Sydney H. Mellone. Blackwood (1902).

**Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*, by Professor Henry Jones. (1912.)

ESSAYS AND ARTICLES:

**Literary Studies*, Vol. II, by Walter Bagehot. Longmans.

**Literary Essays*, by R. H. Hutton. Macmillan.

Corrected Impressions, by George Saintsbury. Heinemann.

Makers of Modern Poetry, by W. J. Dawson. Hodder & Stoughton.

**Literature of the Victorian Era*, by Hugh Walker.

**Survey of English Literature*, by Oliver Elton, Vol. I. Arnold.

Chambers' Encyclopædia of English Literature, by Jeanie Morison.

Encyclopædia Britannica, by Leslie Stephen.

Dictionary of National Biography, by Edmund Gosse.

**Poetry and Religion* (*The Poetry of Barbarism*), by George Santayana. Scribners. (An unsympathetic but able and interesting little study. A useful corrective for "strong, thick, stupefying incense smoke.")

Suggestive references are made to Browning's art and thought in relation to modern life in the following:

The Soul of Modern Poetry, by R. H. Strachan. Hodder & Stoughton.

Victorian Poetry, by John Drinkwater. Hodder & Stoughton.

BROWNING'S POETRY:

The Poetical Works of Robert Browning (in two volumes), edited by Augustine Birrell. (1903.) John Murray.

Selections from Browning. John Murray.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

BIBLIOGRAPHIES:

Browning Bibliography, by F. J. Furnivall. (1883.)
Bibliography, by T. J. Wise.
Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century, by Robertson Nicoll and T. J. Wise. (1895.)

Quotation from an amusing letter written by the poet to one of the family towards the end of his life:

"I went to Lord Rosebery's in my gown (the Prince told Lord Rosebery it was a decided success) and was presented to the Shah, who asked me: '*Vous étés un poète?*' '*On s'est permis de le dire quelque fois.*' '*Et vous avez fait des livres?*' '*Oui.*' '*Plusieurs?*' '*Trop.*' '*Voulez vous me faire le cadeau d'un livre afin que je puisse me ressouvenir de vous?*' '*Certainement.*' So next day I went to Bumpus's and chose two volumes of my selections, prettily bound, and sent them to the Persian Minister, who told me to do so. I concluded he got them the same day."

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